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PRACTICAL **YOGA**

Suman Seth



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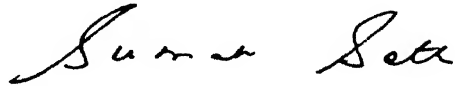
Dedicated
to
the Spirit that dwells within each one of us
and
to my Guru—and father,
Shri Ananda Sai,
in whom I see
the clearest manifestation of that Spirit

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Foreword

During recent years, there has been considerable interest in the science of Yoga and its effect on the human body and mind for health and healing. Even the advanced western scientific thought has been seized with the possibility of a breakthrough in complex cardiological and various other conditions, through the medium of Yoga.

Yoga is probably needed more today than it was when the ancient sages worded their wisdom. Though man is the most adaptable of creatures, there is a limit to which he can push himself without adversely affecting his health. Life today has become one of stress and strain, tension and frustration, cut-throat competition and breakneck speed. The human mind and body find it difficult to cope up with these, and mind-based or psychosomatic ailments are on the increase.

It is only too well known that as a result, various systems in the body are affected and this results in coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, peptic ulcer, colitis, arthritis, diabetes, asthma, insomnia, etc. We cannot always change stress situations in our lives but what we can change with a regular practice of Yoga, are our attitudes and reactions to stress situations, so as to lessen their onslaught on health.

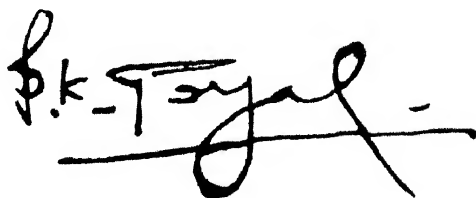
Yoga is not only a preventive against disease, but where disease has already crept in, Yoga techniques are in no way antagonistic to modern medicine. They are a powerful adjunct, an ally, in the cure of disease. Within these deceptively simple physio-psycho-spiritual practices, lie the fruits of

thousands of years of careful and systematic study.

Science and technology today are marching ahead with such rapid strides that while the ink dries, a new invention has probably been made. This is very applicable to the rate of progress in the medical science. The human body has been progressively dissected threadbare and the list of diseases and the combination of cures for them multiply. Yet, there are diseases for which even the causes allude man's intelligence

In these circumstances, Yoga today has great utility for the common man. It is no longer only for Sanyasins and recluses.

This book will doubtlessly be of immense value to both the layman and the serious student of Yoga. Suman Seth, with over a decade's experience in teaching Yoga around the globe, through lectures, classes and television programmes, is the right person to present the subject in its practical aspect. She has really done this in a lucid and simple manner.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B.K. Goyal', with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

(Dr. B.K. GOYAL)

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INTRODUCTION

Yoga is a very ancient system that originated in India. The oldest use of the word *Yoga* is found in the *Vedas* — in the *Rig Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. It is derived from the sanskrit root *yuj* meaning 'to bind' or 'to yoke'. Through the practice of Yoga, man is made aware of the interdependence of all things, animate and inanimate, in the entire universe. Nothing can be taken in isolation. 'No man is an island.' This sense of oneness of all things is the 'yoking' or 'union' implied in the word Yoga. The *Atharva Veda* says, 'The one light appears in diverse forms, and in the *Isha Upanishad* a similar opinion is voiced, 'He alone sees, who sees all beings as himself.'

Yoga consists of physical and mental disciplines that make us healthy, alert and happy, transforming our perception of the world and the way we live in it. Although Yoga has grown and been altered continuously, through thousands of years, to meet the changing conditions of mankind, it has always been directed to allowing the individual to achieve his or her full potential as a human being and to blossom forth to spiritual consciousness.

In recent times, a global interest in this subject has developed, with different interests and motivations. The release of tensions, correction of posture, physical fitness for health, efficiency and vigour and treatment of chronic functional disorders are but some of the motivating factors.

The classical literature on Yoga, essentially deals with the subject as a science of self-realisation. It is based on the

oriental system of education, which was related solely to the study of the self. As a result, its language and its technical terms sound different to most of us, because our education is concerned mainly with knowledge of the objective, external world. Therefore, if the present interest in the subject is to be served, practical Yoga techniques have to be presented in a language to which we are more accustomed.

Yoga is not a religion. It is a pure science, like mathematics or physics or chemistry. It is an exact science, a science of the inner being. All religions are based on a system of beliefs but Yoga does not tell you to believe in anything. Just perform it as a scientific experiment. Water evaporates when it is heated to 100°C. No belief is needed to accept this statement, which can easily be verified by an experiment. Similarly, Yoga is a scientific methodology for inner awakening — a process of inner transformation. And Yoga is not Hindu because the Hindus discovered it. Just as the laws of any science are universal, so also Yoga is universal and its laws are equally applicable to all people and at all times.

Each individual is responsible for his salvation, his evolution. To effect this, Yoga goes from the gross to the subtle. We start with the body postures. Some people do not understand how trifling body adjustments can affect the mind and the total personality. But a scientific approach must start with the body because we are rooted in it. Yogis realised that a healthy body is a prerequisite for a healthy mind and for all pursuits — creative, intellectual and spiritual. They referred to the body as the holy temple of the soul and took great care to keep it in a smooth, working condition for as long as possible. Long-lasting youth is also mentioned. It is stated in the *Yoga Chintamani*: ‘Since the

body is the means to duty, wealth, pleasure and salvation, it should always be protected, with all one's heart, by the student of Yoga.'

Today we know a human being to be a mind-body complex, but psycho-analysis in its present form has taken root only recently. Yoga, which is over 6,000 years old, had already accepted the importance of the mind and the subconscious over the total being. It had accepted that the influence of the mind on the body is far more profound than that of the body on the mind. Hell and heaven are not places — they are attitudes of the mind. A Yogi and a culprit, both have become so because of the way they use their minds. The mind registers its ulcers far more deeply than the stomach and the duodenum. Today, neurosis is the normal condition of man. The disintegrated personality is obliged to think one thing, speak another, and behave still differently. The chaos of the outside world is a reflection of that within each one of us. Yoga creates an order within the chaos that we are. Through Yoga, we are able to relate better to ourselves, to other human beings and to our environment. The feeling of 'alienation' disappears and an inner harmony or integration occurs. All Yogic practices are psychosomatic in the final analysis. They are intended to develop the practitioner's mind and body and to bring about a harmony between them and between the different urges within each one of us. A constantly chattering mind does not allow any peace or happiness. Rush, stress and strain are a part of our lives today and cannot be avoided; but, with Yoga, what we can change is our reaction and our attitude to stress, thereby diminishing the ravages caused by it. When we realise that most diseases are basically rooted in the mind, the contribution of Yoga to health on this level

can be seen to be tremendous. Medical science has made great progress in recent times. It has discovered the germs which cause disease, diagnosed the diseases and prescribed the right remedies. Preventive measures are there and research continues. But can this alone ensure health and happiness? Can medicine give mental equilibrium, poise and quietude? This is where Yoga must come in. Otherwise, degenerative diseases and diseases of stress, like cancer, heart-attack, diabetes and hypertension will assume even more enormous proportions.

After tackling the body-mind axis, Yoga takes us into higher realms of spiritual awareness. No less a man than Albert Einstein has said, 'The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical.' It is the sower of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in the most primitive form — this knowledge, this feeling, is at the centre of true religiousness.

'The Cosmic religious experience is the strongest and oldest mainspring of scientific research. My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior Spirit who reveals Himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God.'

In the *Shvetaashvatara Upanishad*, the qualities of a Yogi, whose body shines with the fire of Yoga, are described, and

it is said that, 'disease, old age and death do not come to him; his body becomes supple and healthy, his mind devoid of greed and full of peace and satisfaction.'

In the *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā* it is said: 'Slim body, joyous face, sonorous voice, sparkling eyes, positive good health, virility, exuberance of vitality and radiance and purity of the nervous system are a few of the physical characteristics endowed by the practise of Yoga.' Further, in the *Gorakṣhapaddhati* it is said: 'Free from all disease, the Yogi evolves a lissom body, delicate as the tender inside of a lotus stalk and thus enjoys youthful longevity.'

To find out what Yoga is, the simplest way is to practise it yourself. The above qualities will be evident and will be experienced to some extent by everyone who practises Yoga faithfully. No amount of theoretical knowledge can give you as clear an understanding of the subject as practice will. There is an ancient Hindu proverb which says: 'He who tastes a grain of mustard seed knows more of its flavours than he who sees an elephant-load of it.' Certain Yoga texts rightly put it when they say: 'How can a virgin comprehend the conjugal bliss of a married woman?'

All our sciences and philosophies, our religions, cultural and political activities and all that we think or do is ultimately directed towards one goal — reduction of pain, tension and misery. But the speed at which we live today makes the world almost a mad house and there are only two alternatives before each one of us if we want peace and happiness. Either we have to turn to Yoga, or we have to find solace, temporarily, in alcohol, drugs, neurotic sex, etc. If you are not meditative, then sooner or later you have to find other methods of release, so that you can lose yourself and be at ease, even if only for a short while.

Origin and History of Yoga

The earliest evidence of Yoga is archaeological. Excavations in Mohenjodaro and Harappa have revealed signs of an ancient civilization which flourished in India as early as 400 B C and perhaps earlier. Among the finds are some stone seals showing godlike figures in Yogic postures. One of the seals shows Lord Shiva, who according to tradition and scriptures, is the founder of Yoga.

The earliest use of the word *Yoga* as a technical term is found in the *Rig Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. Subsequently, in ancient Indian literature, the word is repeated many times. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the most authoritative texts on Yoga, written in the sixth century B C, there are three definitions of Yoga.

According to the first definition, Yoga means a state of *samatvam* or equipoise, an inner stillness of the mind, where opposites like success and failure make little difference.

In the second definition, it is said that a Yogi is one who is concerned only with doing the action well and not with the consequences.

In the third definition, Yoga is described as a state of separation from sorrow. When that state of supreme happiness is achieved there remains nothing else to be achieved.

One historically recorded exponent of Yoga was the great Yogi, Gorakshnath, who lived during the first few centuries A D. In his time, the science of Yoga was not popular, but Gorakshnath taught much to his close disciples. Later, we have the classic treatises on Yoga — *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* of Swatmaram and the *Gheranda Samhita* by the Rishi Gheranda. It is difficult to date these texts precisely. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, written in the 15th century, is based on a work by

Gorakshnath and it describes fifteen postures. Another old text, the *Shiva Samhita*, lists more than eighty.

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* compiled in about second century A D describes Yoga as a 'cessation of the activities of the mind'. His system is known as Raja Yoga or Ashtanga Yoga because he mentions eight stages of Yoga, the practise of which is necessary for the total evolution of a human being

These are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharna, Dhyana and Samadhi. (See the gate-fold.)

GENERAL HINTS

Age

You can start practising Yoga at all ages and in all conditions of the body — stiff, tense, flabby, etc. These negative conditions will gradually disappear. I have students in their eighties who have just begun Yoga. Difficult practices are best avoided by children until the age of 12.

Beginners

Beginners should not be in a hurry and should not strain to come to the perfect position at once. They should do the Asanas and other Yogic practices according to their own capacity. Even if the postures are not perfect in the beginning it does not matter. Regular practise will gradually lead to perfection. The same warning applies to those who resort to Yoga practice after an interval of a few weeks.

Patients

If you have just recovered from an illness, it is advisable to first consult a Yoga therapist and then start to practise. This holds especially true for those who have undergone major operations or are suffering from heart trouble or abnormal blood pressure. Back problems like spondylosis and slipped disc improve tremendously with Yoga, but wrong practices can worsen them.

Women

Women should suspend all Yoga practices except Shavasana (corpse pose) and Nadi Shuddhi (alternate nostril breathing) during the menstrual period. It is advisable not to start Yoga without proper guidance in pregnancy, but women who are regular practitioners may continue to practise for about the first three months. They should, however, leave out the strenuous abdominal exercises. Some poses such as Sarvangasana (shoulder stand) and Matsyasana (fish pose) may be practised with benefit even upto the sixth or seventh month of pregnancy but it would be best to consult a Yoga therapist. After childbirth, depending upon the condition of the body, women can resume Asana practice after the third or fourth month. There are special ante-natal practices which can be done earlier, but proper guidance is needed:

Emptying the Bowels

Before starting Yoga practice, the bladder and intestines should be emptied. If you are constipated, it is good to drink two or three glasses of salted warm water and then practise the four Asanas given for Shanka-Prakshalan (Pg. 91). Otherwise, you can drink a glass of plain water in the morning followed by the practise of a little Uddiyana Bandha (stomach uplift) and Nauli Kriya (isolation and rolling of the abdominal recti). You may give your stomach a gentle massage with your hands. The bowels will get evacuated. The practise of inverted poses like Sirshasana and Sarvangasana also helps bowel movement. Those starting Yoga for the first time and those resuming after a long interval would find it beneficial to take a mild purgative and clean

their bowels before practising. I recommend the use of Ayurvedic herbal products, like *harad* or *triphala* for a few days.

Time

The morning hours, when the stomach is almost empty after the evacuation of the bowels, are very conducive for Yoga. In Sanskrit, the early morning is known as *Brahmamuhurta*, 'the moments of the divine'. If there is a little stiffness in the body, either walk briskly for a while or perform a few *Surya Namaskars* (salutations to the sun).

Beginners may find their bodies more flexible in the evenings than in the mornings. *Asanas* may also be practised five hours after lunch, if only a cup of liquid has been drunk in between. Regularity is important. You may have a cup of tea, coffee or milk half-an-hour before doing the *Asanas*.

Place

Yoga poses should be practised in an airy room or in the open. Avoid hot sunshine and draughts. Perform your practices on a carpet or *chatai* covered with a clean piece of cloth. Do not practise directly under a fan.

Dress

This should be clean, minimum, loose and light. Remove spectacles, wrist-watches and ornaments. Women should wear a firm fitting brassiere so as to avoid damage to the delicate tissues.

Bathing

As a general rule it is better to have a bath before the practice, but it is not a necessity. If you perspire a great deal, bathing can be done about half an hour after practice. A cold-water bath is very beneficial, but if weather and body conditions do not permit it, a lukewarm bath may be substituted. When bathing, rub the body well with your palms. This transmits Prana and also promotes good circulation. An oil bath or massage once a week helps to improve health. This should be taken a little after Asana practice, never before.

Games and Physical Exercises

There is no harm in performing Yogic practices and other physical exercises or games side by side. However, both should not be mixed up or practised one after another. Unlike the rhythmic breathing in Yogic practices, breathing becomes vigorous in games and other exercises and this will disturb the particular rhythm you are trying to cultivate in the body and mind through Yoga. So you may perform Yoga in the morning and play games or do physical exercises in the evenings. Otherwise, if both have to be practised at the same period, the physical exercises can be done in the beginning and after a sufficient rest, of at least half-an-hour, the Yoga practices can follow.

Rest

In between Asanas, whenever necessary, one should relax in Shavasana (corpse pose). After practising all the poses and

before starting Pranayama, Shavasana should be done for a longer time, for a minimum of at least three minutes. One should see that there is no strain nor any heavy breathing at all during the practice. Do not practise to the point of fatigue. Even at the end of the practice one should feel quite fresh, both physically and mentally.

Breathing

During the practice of Asanas the breath should never be retained for a long time. It does not matter if you stop the breath for a few moments when necessary, such as while raising the legs to form Halasana (plough pose) or Sarvangasana (shoulder stand) or while raising the body to form Paschimottanasana (forward bend). Again, during Uddiyana Bandha and Nauli Kriya, the external retention of the breath (keeping the breath out) comes about almost automatically.

As a general rule, it is good to exhale as you bend the body forward, to inhale as the body is bending backward or stretching and to breathe normally at all other times. It is always better to breathe through the nose and never through the mouth, except in such special cases, as Sitali (cooling breath) and Sitkari, (wheezing breath) when inhalation has to be through the mouth.

Awareness

When doing Asanas, always try to do them slowly and with full awareness of the body. The muscles which are not involved in the pose should be relaxed. Do not be tense. Practise 'differential relaxation'. If you feel pain or pleasure, try

6 *Practical Yoga*

not to react to it, but merely be aware of the feeling.

Sequence

Asanas should be done first, followed by Pranayama and finally, meditation.

Diet

There are no 'musts' about the diet except that strong stimulants are best avoided. This however, comes gradually of its own accord, when one practises Yoga regularly, and therefore, there is no need to worry over it.

The major consideration of Yoga with regard to nutrition and diet is eating small quantities of food that require a minimum expenditure of energy for digestion and which will leave the body light and satisfied while simultaneously providing proper nourishment and maximum life force or Prana. These objectives are best achieved through foods that we term 'natural' that is, foods that can be ingested as nearly as possible in their original state. To the extent that foods are refined, canned, preserved, frozen, smoked, aged, coloured, fumigated, enriched and otherwise processed, they are denatured; they lose their Prana and have an adverse effect on health. Avoid taking iced water and do not drink ~~water~~ during meals but half an hour before or after them. Food should be well chewed.

Remember, all over-indulgence is bad — whether it be in food, drinks, smoking, sports, sex or work. It ruins the body, shatters the nerves, clouds the mind and leads to illness, premature ageing and an untimely death.

MEDITATIVE POSTURES

The sage Patanjali defined Asana as one that gives

स्थिरं सुखं आसनं ।

or steadiness and comfort. Such Asanas are necessary for meditation, because at the time, the body should neither be a hinderance nor a burden on the mind and should be easily forgotten. The comfort can be attained by the meditative postures, which are 28 in number. I will give, in this book, four of the classic meditative postures. Select any one of them that suits you and learn to sit in it for a few minutes everyday. Your body will find its own centre of gravity, so that you can easily transcend it to dwell in the spiritual and mental realms. It is only when the body is steady and still that one can rise to higher realms of consciousness. In the meditative Asanas your body is as still as a living statue. The vital energies are gathered and conserved. In all these Asanas, the head, neck and back are kept erect. This conforms with Krishna's command in the *Bhagwad Gita*:

समम काया शिरो ग्रीवा

This vertical position of the spine helps the nerve currents to flow freely through the different nerve centres and awakens the latent psychic forces. The meditative postures are a necessary prerequisite to Yoga practices.

Sukhasana or The Comfortable Pose

This is the most practical meditative posture for beginners.



Technique: Sit on the floor with the legs stretched forward.

Bend the right leg and place the heel under the left thigh. Likewise, bend the left leg and place the left heel under the right thigh. Vary this position, sometimes placing the right leg over the left and sometimes the left leg over the right. Hold the spine naturally straight. The head, the neck and the back should be held in a straight line. The abdomen is well controlled, shoulders pulled back a little. Place the hands on the knees with the palms turned downward and covering the knee caps. The arms, the elbows and the hands should be relaxed. Close your eyes and relax the whole body. Become aware of your breathing. Try to feel the inner quietude, silence, stillness and peace.

Time: You may sit in this pose whenever you like, for as long as you like.

Benefits: This is a good pose for those who cannot sit in any other posture for meditation or for the breathing exercises. Its main value lies in the fact that it helps to establish an inner harmony with yourself. It also makes you aware of any nervous or muscular agitations and helps you get over them. It conditions and prepares you physically and mentally for the Yoga practice.

Note: Once you can comfortably do the other meditative postures, Sukhasana can be discarded.

Some people, specially Western people, or those who never sit on the floor, find even Sukhasana difficult. They often jokingly refer to it as Dukhasana (*dukh*-sorrow). These people may sit on a pillow about 6 inches high or may tie a cloth round the back and knees if they have to sit for a long time.

Padmasana or The Lotus Pose

Technique: Sit with the legs stretched fully forward. Then bend your right leg at the knee joint and folding it, rest the right foot on the left thigh with the sole turned up. Let the right knee touch the floor. If your right knee comes up, off the floor, you are not yet ready for Padmasana. If your right knee does touch the floor, fold the left leg so that the left heel rests on the right thigh — now both knees should be on the floor. The hands may be kept in two ways: (a) Place your left hand between the heels with the palm turned up and



place the right hand over the left in a similar manner, or (b) stretch out your arms, resting the wrists on the corresponding knees, palms turned up in Chin Mudra with your index finger touching the thumb. Keep your head, neck and trunk of the body in a straight line. Breathe normally. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* describes how to assume Padmasana with beautiful simplicity — ‘Place each foot on the opposite thigh’.

Time: When Padmasana is practised along with other Asanas, it can be done for 1 minute. When practised by itself, the duration can be as long as you find it comfortable.

Benefits: Padmasana is the classic posture for meditation and Pranayama. After the initial knee and ankle pains have been overcome, it is one of the most relaxing poses. It contributes to the tranquility of the mind. On the physical level, it makes the joints flexible and aids in strengthening the nerves and muscles of the legs and thighs. There is increased blood circulation in the abdomino-genital region. Padmasana also helps to keep wind, bile and phlegm in proper proportion.

Points to watch: If you are unable to bend both legs, practise with one leg before you try the other. Do not apply force by pulling your foot — the stretch should come from your thighs to prevent damage to the ligaments of your feet and ankles.

Do not do: If you have recently sprained or fractured your ankle; if you have a knee problem or if you have varicose veins.

Vajrasana or The Hardy Pose

Vajrasana is a good posture for meditation and for Pranayama, especially for those who find the cross-legged postures uncomfortable.



Technique: Sit with your legs stretched out in front of you.

Fold one leg at the knee joint and place the sole under the buttock of the same side by turning it upward. Place the other sole in the same way. The toes should touch and the heels should be apart. The knees should be together. Place the palms on the respective thighs, keep the trunk of the body, the head and the neck in a straight line. Drop the eyelids. Relax the body and breathe normally. In the beginning, there may be a slight pain in the knees and ankles, but it will soon pass.

Time: When Vajrasana is practised along with the other Asanas, it can be held for 1 minute. Otherwise, it may be held for 6 to 10 minutes.

Benefits: The benefits of this posture are all out of proportion to the ease with which it can be performed. Vajrasana gives considerable relief to the people suffering from abdominal discomfort. Even heart-patients who feel 'heavy in the chest' after their main meals get relief if they sit in this posture for 6 to 10 minutes, immediately after finishing their meals. This is the only Yogic posture which can be practised on a full stomach. It helps digestion and relieves palpitation. It stimulates the most vital part — *konda*, in Yogic language — situated behind the navel pit and tones up the entire nervous system, making the body hardy as the name indicates. Knee and ankle joints are made supple. Rheumatic pains in the knees slowly start disappearing.

Points to watch: Let the major weight of the body fall on the ankles.

Do not do: If you have a bad ankle or a knee fracture.

Note: Placing the buttocks on the floor, between the parted heels is a variation of Vajrasana

Siddhasana or The Accomplished Pose

Technique: Sit with the legs stretched forward. Fold the right leg and place the heel against the perineum, i.e., the soft flesh between the genitals and anus. The right toe should touch the left thigh closely. Then bend the left leg, placing the left heel against the pubic bone. The outer edge of the left foot, sole upturned, is inserted in the fold between the calf and the thigh of the right leg. It may be necessary to move and adjust the right leg for this. Keep the trunk of the



body, the neck, and the head in a straight line. The hands may be held in Gyana Mudra (See pg. 75), or quite simply, may rest flat on the knees as in Sukhasana. Breathe normally throughout the pose. The thighs and knees of both legs are kept flat on the floor.

Time: One minute daily, for the common man for whom this book is written. The Yogis used to sit in Siddhasana for hours.

Benefits: Siddhasana is highly praised in the Yoga texts as the best among Asanas. It is practised mainly for its spiritual values. It has a calming effect on the entire nervous system. It facilitates the control of the mind, and the sense organs and helps concentration. It automatically activates the two sexually related psychomuscular locks — Moola Bandha and Vajroli Mudra, which redirect sexual nervous impulses back, up the spine, to the brain. Because of this, Siddhasana gives the practitioner control over the sexual function, which he can use either to maintain Brahmacharya — sexual celibacy, and sublimate the sexual energy upward for spiritual evolution, or to gain greater control over the sensory sexual function.

Do not do: If you have sciatica or any sacral infections.

Caution: Good care must be taken to prevent hurting the genitals while placing the heels in position.

Note: Siddhasana can only be practised by men. It may be practised to greater advantages with Jalandhara Bandha and Moola Bandha.

CULTURAL ASANAS

Asanas should be looked upon as 'postures' or 'postural patterns' instead of 'exercises'. In every Asana one should try to withdraw one's voluntary effort leading to a feeling of stability, comfort, relaxation and lightness. One cannot expect these to happen on the very first day of the practice or at the very first attempt of a new Asana. It is generally agreed that any new Asana will always act as an exercise causing some exertion in the beginning. In spite of this, in due course of time, an Asana should become a posture for the individual.

While learning or maintaining any Asana, the following points will help one to obtain the maximum benefits from that particular Asana.

1. Feel and recognise tensions present in the different regions of the body so that, eventually, one can experience the body to be in a state of equilibrium.
2. Awareness of the breathing activity during the maintenance of an Asana will help the individual to ease out stresses and strains during the practice of that particular Asana. Try to experience a smooth and rhythmic breathing Asana. Try to experience a smooth and rhythmic breathing pattern, progressing from grosser to subtler levels, and this awareness will automatically ease out tension. During the initial phase, the breath will get disturbed, that is, it will be fast and uneven.
3. Appreciate the stretch and pull of the relatively inactive muscles, rather than the contribution of some other muscles.

4 Appreciate the compression of a particular part of the body — often, the abdominal region

Very often Asanas are presumed to work on the physical plane only. This holds true if Asanas are practised as exercises which mainly work on and through the intellect-body axis. First of all, the decision to move a particular part of the body in a particular way, is taken at the level of the intellect, while performing movements in any exercise system. The nerve impulses from the motor cortex of the brain (centre) travel to the periphery of the voluntary muscles (mostly of the limbs) involved in the action. The muscular action is repetitive (isotonic) or sustained (isometric) in nature. Very often it is of a mixed type. Through practice, the mind-intellect-body axis develops, but the emotional and behavioural aspect as well as the internal organs supplied by the autonomic nervous system remain neglected if Asanas are also performed in this manner.

On the other hand, if Asanas are practised as ‘postures’, or if one switches over from ‘Asanas as exercises’ to ‘Asanas as postures’, the mechanism of action in these Asanas changes significantly. The activity of the intellect and the motor cortex is gradually reduced and may even get completely withdrawn at times, in a successful Asana. The skeletal muscles undergo relaxation and they too are stretched in such a relaxed condition, during the maintenance of the Asana. This stretch may ultimately reach the coverings of the bone (periosteum), ligaments and the capsule of the joints. **This opens up another channel of action where impulses arising at the periphery travel upwards to the brain and here the body starts telling the mind where the muscles are under a constant process of relaxation.** In exercises also, the body does inform the mind, but that informa-

tion originates from contracting muscles or muscles under sustained contraction

On closer analysis, one observes that many Asanas work on the abdominal area while the muscles of the limbs are relaxed. This leads to compression and de-compression of the abdominal organs, which in turn, set up some impulses that go to the (visceral) brain. This is one of the very strong points of Yogasanas which can be made use of in tackling emotional problems or behaviour.

Different modes of breathing can also be used to give rise to different types of activities in the body. But it is better to leave this subject to the discretion of the Yoga teacher.

Talasana or The Tree Pose

Technique: Stand erect with the feet apart. There may be a distance of 8 to 10 inches between the feet. Balance the body weight equally on the heels and toes. Hands are by the side, the chest expanded and the stomach comfortably held in. Slowly, as you inhale, raise both arms sideways and then upwards, joining the palms overhead. Simultaneously, rise up on your toes. The inside of the arms will touch the ears.

Stretch up to maximum height. Maintain the position for 4 seconds while holding the breath in. Looking at a point at eye level helps you to balance. Take care to synchronise the inhalation with the slow upward movement. After the brief standstill, reverse the whole movement, slowly breathe out as the arms and feet come down to starting position.

Time: Repeat 4 times. Do it as soon as you wake up. Repeat in the evening. If the position can be maintained



longer without strain, it may be done as a static pose, once only for 1 to 1½ minutes, with slow breathing.

Benefits: Talasana is the first Asana I teach almost every student. Considering its simplicity, the advantages are

many. Talasana gives a good stretch to the spine and to the entire body. Every muscle in the body, from the toes to the fingertips is activated and toned — the entire body gets a gentle stimulation. Whenever you feel lazy or lack energy, do Talasana

The full length body stretch increases height, specially when done between the ages of 12 to 18. But even after that age, there is a slight increase in height. My own height increased from 5'-4 ¼" to 5'-5" when I started practising Yoga at the age of 25, notwithstanding the fact that an increase in height was not my aim.

As you stretch to full stature the inner organs get a chance to adjust. The regular practice of Talasana also improves posture. The co-ordinated rhythmic breathing leads to all round expansion of the lungs. It brings about neuromuscular control. It provides a gentle massage to the abdominal organs and tenses the usually relaxed abdominal and pelvic muscles. It is one of the Asanas which may be practised, with much benefit, even upto the ninth month of pregnancy. This leads to an easy delivery. But when done in pregnancy, the stomach is not to be pulled in.

Points to watch: Co-ordinate rhythmic movements with the breathing. Knees and elbows should not be bent at any stage of this Asana. Stretch the body straight up — do not tilt to any side.

Caution: Do not stretch up without taking in a complete breath

Note: People who are too weak to balance the body on the toes may do this Asana lying on the floor.

Trikonasana or The Triangle

Technique: Trikonasana I — Stand with the feet approximately 24 inches apart. While inhaling raise the right arm straight up, turning the palm upwards at shoulder level. The inside of the arm touches the ear. Slowly, bend the trunk of your body, laterally to the left. The left arm slides down as low as possible towards the left ankle. When full lateral stretch is attained, retain the breath and hold the position for 4 seconds.

Then as you exhale, gently return to the starting position. Repeat the pose on the other side.

Trikonasana II — Keep the feet in the same position as Trikonasana I, i.e., 24 inches apart. Raise your arms sideways to shoulder level, palms facing upwards. Twist the body from the waist to the right and exhaling bend down to touch the right toe with the left hand. The right arm remains stretched up — look at the right hand. Inhaling, bring the arms back to shoulder level and repeat the posture on the other side.

Time: Bend 3 times on each side. Alternately, you may practise the pose in a static way only once on each side. In that case, breathe normally throughout the Asana and maintain it from $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 minute on each side.

Benefits: The main benefit of Trikonasana is that it dissolves the 'spare tyre' around the waist and keeps you slim and shapely. I specially recommend it to women. Even a month's practice takes inches off your midriff. In addition



to this, its regular practice keeps the spine elastic. It improves the functioning of the lungs and purifies the blood, imparting a glow to the complexion. All the side muscles of the body are alternately stretched and relaxed.

Points to watch: Do not bend the knees. Feet should be firmly placed. See that you do not change the position of your feet. The trunk should bend only sideways, laterally — not forward or backward. Keep the abdomen pulled in while bending.

Do not do: If you have serious respiratory problems or, if you are pregnant

Bhujangasana or The Cobra Pose

Bhyang means 'a cobra' In this posture, the upper body is lifted from the floor like a snake lifts its hood.

Technique: Lie face down with the forehead touching the floor. Relax all the muscles completely. Place the palms on the floor, below the corresponding shoulders, with the elbows raised and close to the trunk of the body. Keep the legs close together on the floor, with the toes pointed. Now slowly raise the head and bend the neck as far back as possible.

After this has been done, slowly raise the chest also, bending the vertebrae backward, one by one. The lower part of the body, from the navel to the toes, should be touching the floor. Look up and behind you as far as possible.

Stay this way for a while and then come down, lowering the trunk first, then the head, very slowly to the ground. Inhale while rising, breathe normally while retaining the pose and exhale while coming down.

Time: Repeat 4 times, retaining the pose for 6 to 10 seconds.



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at a time. Gradually reduce this repetition and try to retain the pose just once for a maximum duration of 1 minute.

Benefits: This is an excellent pose to exercise and strengthen the back muscles. Even a single successful attempt at it reduces an aching back, if the pain is due to strain or over-work. The spine becomes elastic and the chest expands. The cranial nerves are exercised and are toned up. Any slight displacement of the spinal column and slipped disc gets adjusted. Bhujangasana reduces abdominal fat and relieves constipation and flatulence. It is particularly useful for women in toning the ovaries and uterus. Menstrual troubles are eliminated.

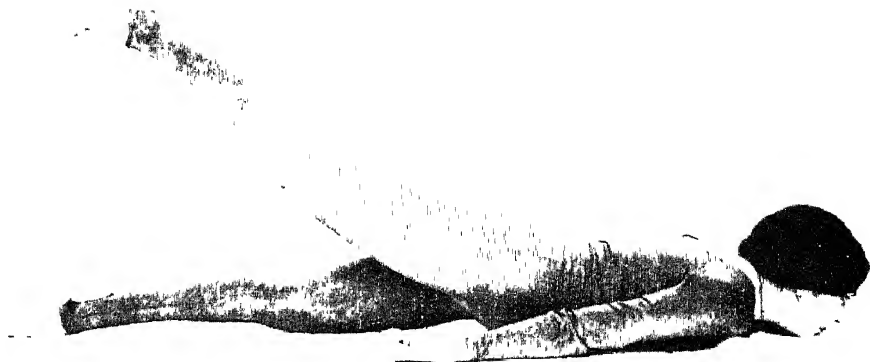
Points to watch: Do not raise the body suddenly with a jerk. Try to pull the chest up with the help of the back muscles, rather than allowing weight to fall on the hands. Avoid the tendency to breathe through the mouth.

Do not do: If you have a hiatus hernia or a hyperactive thyroid.

Shalabhasana or The Locust Pose

Technique: Lie on your stomach with your chin touching the ground. Keep the hands by the side of the body, close the fingers with the fists facing upwards. Keep the toes pointed. Inhale.

Retaining the breath, stiffen the body and raise either one or both legs without bending the knees. Allow the entire weight to rest on the chest and arms. Maintain the pose for as long as you can. Exhaling, slowly lower the legs.



Time: Do this Asana 3 to 6 times, retaining the pose for 10 seconds at a time. Gradually reduce the repetition and try to maintain the pose just once for a maximum duration of 1 minute.

Benefits: In this pose the back, pelvis and abdomen are exercised which helps to relieve sluggishness of the liver and lumbago. The tendency of feeling flatulent a short while after every meal is cured by a regular practice of this Asana. This Asana is very good for blood circulation, and brings a large supply of blood to the kidneys, thus cleaning and regenerating them. Doing Shalabhasana 6 times is equivalent to a 1 ½ km. walk.

Points to Watch: Of all the Asanas, it is only Shalabhasana which requires a sudden movement of the lower extremities in its practice. But here too, the action, though sudden, should be perfectly smooth. If you find it very difficult to raise your legs try tucking your fists underneath your thighs before lifting them up.

Do not do: If you have high blood pressure or heart trouble.

Note: Consult your physician or Yoga therapist before doing this Asana.

Dhanurasana or The Bow Pose

The pose is called Dhanurasana because in this posture the body resembles a stringed bow. *Dhanush* in Sanskrit means 'a bow'.



Technique: Lie face down with the forehead touching the floor. Gently fold the legs back and hold the ankles with the corresponding hands. Raise the head, chest and thighs, arching the back and allowing the entire weight of the body to fall on the abdomen.

Inhale while rising, breathe normally while retaining the pose and exhale while coming down.

Time: Repeat 3 to 6 times retaining the pose for 10 seconds at a time. Gradually reduce this repetition and try to retain the pose just once for a maximum duration of 1 minute.

Benefits: This pose gives all the benefits gained by the practice of Bhujangasana (cobra pose) and Shalabhasana (locust pose). In addition, it reduces abdominal fat, increases the peristaltic movement of the bowels and tones up the pancreas, thus helping to cure diabetes. This Asana is of special benefit to women. It firms the bust and arms. Rigidity of the spine, spondylosis, slipped disc and other dislocations in the spinal column can be cured by Dhanurasana and Shalabhasana, without the patient being forced to rest or undergo surgical treatment. It also cures hunch-back.

Points to Watch: If it is too difficult, practise with one foot at a time.

Do not do: If you have high blood pressure, hernia, duodenal ulcer or peptic ulcer.

Caution: Be gentle with your body. A sudden jerk upwards can cause harm.

Pavanmuktasana or The Gas Relieving Pose

In Sanskrit, *pavana* means 'wind' and *mukta* means 'to be free of'. This posture rids the body of gas.



Technique: Lie flat on your back. Raise the right leg and bend the knee while exhaling. Tightly press the knee against the abdomen with both hands. Now raise your head up and touch the tip of your nose to the right knee. The left leg remains straight on the ground. Hold this position for 4 to 5 normal breaths.

Then, keep the head on the floor, release the finger lock on the right knee, straighten the leg and put it on the floor. Repeat with the other leg. This is Ardha (half) Pavanmuktasana.

For full Pavanmuktasana, repeat, raising both the legs, pressing the knees to the abdomen in a knee-chest position and lifting the head to rest between the knees.

Time: In the beginning, practise only Ardha Pavanmuktasana, 3 to 6 times. After a few days, practise with both legs, 3 to 6 times.

Benefits: This is an excellent pose for relieving gas in the stomach. It aids in toning the abdominal viscera. Pavanmuktasana takes away the feeling of tiredness; instead, one feels exhilarated throughout the day. It relieves constipation, indigestion, obstruction in urine and seminal disorders.

Points to Watch: The eyes may be kept closed if you find it more relaxing. If there is excess fat and flabbiness, it will not be possible to touch the knee to the nose. Keep working patiently.

Do not do: If you have cervical spondylosis, do not lift the head. Practise only the leg position.

Padahastasana or The Hands To Feet Pose

In Sanskrit, *pada* means 'foot' and *hasta* means 'hand'.

Technique: Stand erect with the feet comfortably together,



weight evenly distributed between heels and toes

Raise the arms over the head, with the palms facing forward. Bend backwards. Exhale slowly as you bend forward and hold the toes or ankles without bending the knees. If you cannot bend that far, bend as much as you can. Try to bring the face close to the knees. Breathe normally while retaining the pose and inhale as you come up.

Time: Repeat the pose 3 to 6 times, retaining it for 10 seconds at a time. Gradually reduce this repetition and maintain the pose just once for about 1 minute.

Benefits: By its two-fold action, namely, the intra-abdominal compression and the deep stretching of the posterior muscles, affecting the abdomen, waist-line and hips, this posture tones the abdominal and pelvic organs and aids in loosening, distributing and reducing ugly and unhealthy fat. Like Paschimottanasana, this Asana has a beneficial effect on the spine, allowing the muscles in the back and the legs to be stretched to their fullest extent. Rest is given to the heart and the organs of the head are benefited by the great amount of blood supplied to them.

Points to watch: If you cannot reach your toes, hold your hands as low as you can without bending your knees. Avoid sudden jerky movements of the spine. Remember, you must keep the bottom half of your body stationary, the knees tightly pulled in. Breathing should be even. At the first sign of laboured breathing come back to standing position.

Do not do: If you have a slipped disc or a middle-ear disturbance.

Bhadrasana or The Auspicious Pose

Technique: Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. Bend the knees outwards, drawing the feet towards you. Join the soles of your feet together so that from the heels to the toes they are in full contact. The outer edges of the feet are on the floor. Clasp the ankles.

Keeping the knees in touch with the ground or holding them as close to the ground as you can manage, draw in



your joined feet, as close to the body as possible. The two heels should ultimately touch the perineum. Do not bend your back forward. Stretch the spine so that you are sitting tall. The anus as well as the pelvis (lower abdomen) are contracted. If you are not able to assume the final pose, bring the heels as close to the generative organ as possible. You can also place the palms on the respective knees, pressing them down.

Time: After the final posture is achieved it should be held for 15 seconds. The duration may be increased by 15 seconds every week, finally upto 2 minutes.

Benefits: In Bhadrasana, the outward stretch of the knees aids in toning and making firm the muscles of the inner thighs and the sex organs. In fact, the whole pelvis, the abdomen and the back get a plentiful supply of blood and are stimulated. It keeps the kidneys, the prostate and the urinary bladder healthy. Bhadrasana is especially recommended for people suffering from urinary disorders. It strengthens the inguinal and hamstring muscles and can be prophylactic for hernia. This is a useful pose to practise during pregnancy. I have found that pregnant women who sit in this pose daily for a few minutes have an easy and natural delivery. It also increases the chances of conception.

Points to Watch: Try consciously to relax the muscles that are being stretched, mostly across the thighs and groin. This way you can slowly lower your knees. Do not jerk them.

Caution: Unmarried girls should not strain too much to perfect this pose as it can rupture the hymen.

Simhasana or The Lion Pose

Technique: Sit on the ground with your legs stretched in front. Bend the right knee and place the right foot under the left buttock by slightly rising from the seat. Then bend the left knee and place the left foot likewise under the right buttock. In this Asana the knees should not be kept touching each other. Keep a distance of about 4 inches between them. Place both the palms on the respective knees, pressing them lightly. Spread out the fingers to imitate the broad paws of the lion.

Open your mouth and stretch the tongue out, towards the chin, as far as possible. Keep the spine slightly inclined forward and the chest expanded. The eyes may be fixed either between the eyebrows or on the tip of the nose. Breathe mainly through the mouth. This is the final pose of Simhasana. You may press the chin against the chest, but this is not necessary. Withdraw the tongue into the mouth, lift the hands from the knees and straighten the legs.

Time: Maintain the pose for 30 seconds to start with. Slowly increase the duration to a maximum of 1½ minutes.

Benefits: Simhasana gives a natural massage to all the muscles of the face and neck. The face will glow and wrinkles, if any, will be eased out. The eyes and ears will function well. This pose cures foul breath. Speech becomes clearer so this Asana is very good for people who stammer. It accelerates the three Bandhas. Opening the jaws and drawing out the tongue makes the muscles of the neck and throat elastic, thus facilitating the 'chin lock' or Jalandhara



Bandha The pressure exerted by the hands on the knees, the bracing up of the spine and the throwing out of the chest, put together, give a control over the abdominal muscles, naturally forming the Uddiyana Bandha or the 'stomach uplift'. Again, lifting up the buttocks to hold the spine erect and to sit lightly, tends to contract the pelvic muscles, facilitating Moola Bandha or the 'anal contraction'.

Points to Watch: See that there are no frowning lines on your forehead. While doing the Asana the body and face are to be kept a little tense.

Do not do: If you have high blood pressure or any heart trouble.

Gomukhasana or The Cow-faced Pose

Technique: Sit on the floor with your legs stretched in front of you. Bend the left leg from the knee and place the left heels on the ground so that it touches the right hip. Similar-



ly, fold the right leg and make the right knee come over the left knee, at the same time setting the right heel just by the side of the left hip. The thighs will experience a steady stretch. Keep the heels tightly pressed against the hips.

Now raise the right arm over the head, bend it at the elbow and place the right palm below the nape of the neck, between the shoulders. The left arm is lowered on the back, folded upwards from the elbow and its fingers are made to interlock with the fingers of the right hand. The back and neck are held erect. Hold this final pose breathing normally. Then unclasp the hands, straighten the legs and repeat on the other side.

Time: Maintain the pose once on either side, for 15 seconds to start with. Gradually increase to 1 minute on each side.

Benefits: This posture increases lung capacity and is beneficial for all problems concerned with breathing. It helps relieve backache and stiffness in the shoulders. The thighs become very sturdy and the ankle joints become flexible. Gomukhasana is good in cases of general debility. It improves circulation and reduces hyperacidity.

Points to Watch: In the case of men, the sex organs should be adjusted comfortably between the thighs in such a way that there is no undue pressure on them.

Note: Those who find the leg adjustment difficult, may hold only the hand position, either standing or while sitting on a chair. The benefits of this pose can be increased if, after every inhalation, while holding breath out for a few seconds, the anus and the pelvis are contracted and relaxed again.

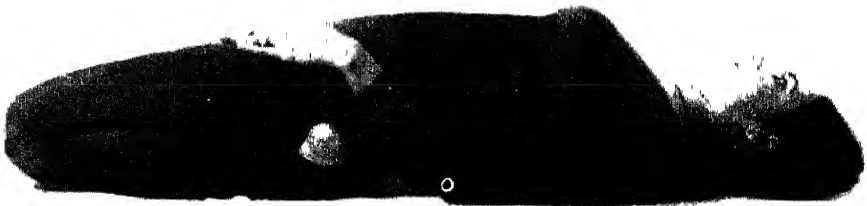
Supta Vajrasana or The Horizontal Hardy Pose

Supta Vajrasana is also known as Paryankasana.

Technique: Sitting in Vajrasana, gradually bend your upper body backwards until your back and head touch the ground. While bending backwards, you can take the help of your elbows by placing them on the ground behind you. In the beginning, if the pull on your thigh muscles becomes difficult to bear, separate the knees and keep about 3 to 12 inches distance between them. After a little practice, however, try to keep the knees together since separating them minimizes the force of abdominal and pelvic stretching. Place the palms on the thighs. Continue to breathe deeply and evenly.

Time: Supta Vajrasana should be done only once and maintained for a maximum duration of 3 minutes. For the first few months, it should be attempted in the evening when it may be easier to practise rather than in the morning.

Benefits: Besides the full stretching of the abdominal and pelvic muscles, even the muscles on the inner side of the thighs get maximum stretch. People whose legs ache will get relief from this pose. It is specially recommended to athletes and those who have to walk or stand for long hours. Supta



Vajrasana exerts a deep pressure on the utero-abdominal and genito-urinary organs, giving them a fresh supply of blood and increasing their muscular tone. Such training of the deep muscles of the sex organs is very beneficial.

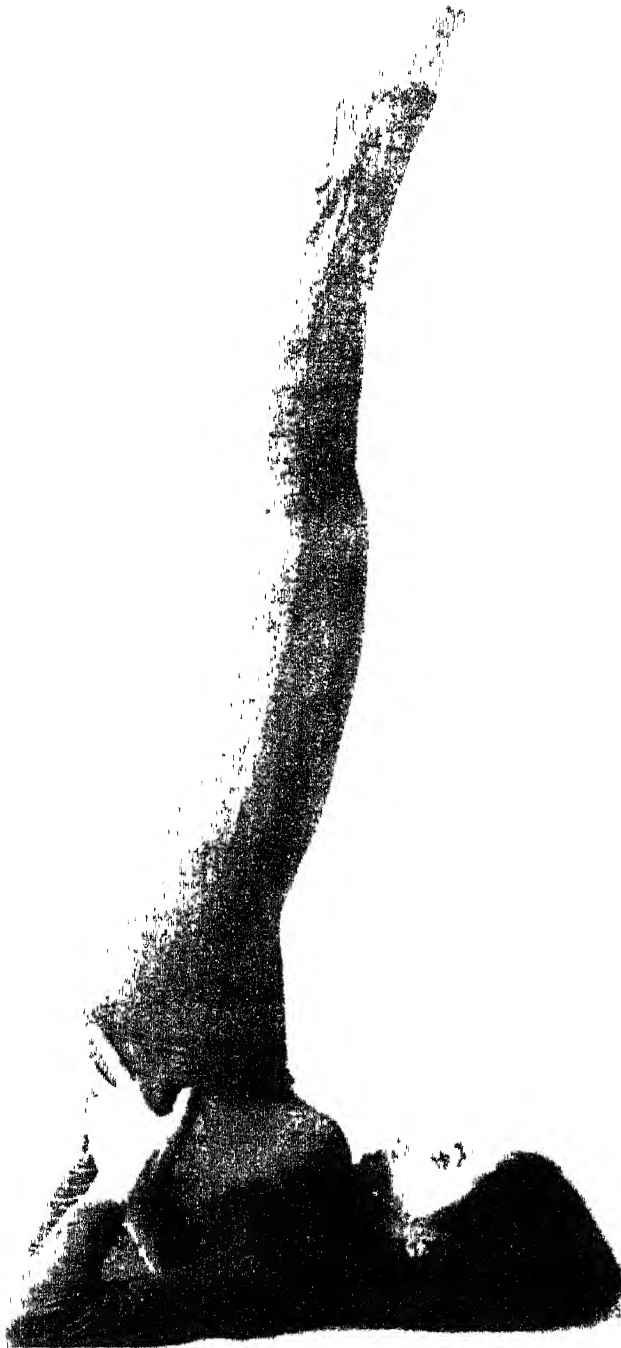
Points to Watch: As Supta Vajrasana is a development of Vajrasana, it should not be started until Vajrasana has been completely mastered. When coming out of the pose, you must first let go of your hands, then raise the trunk and finally relax the legs. Any attempt to relax the legs first is likely to injure the ankle joint.

Do not do: If you cannot do Vajrasana comfortably and if there is any injury in the ankle or knee joint.

Sarvangasana or The Shoulder Stand

The pose is called Sarvangasana because it influences the thyroid, and through it, the whole body and its functions. In Sanskrit, *sarva* means 'the whole' and *anga* means the 'body'.

Technique: Lie flat on the back placing hands alongside the body. Raise the legs to an angle of 90°. Then raise the trunk of the body to a vertical position, until the chin rests against the chest. As you raise the trunk, simultaneously raise the forearms, without widening or shifting the elbows, to support the back. The entire body from neck to toe should be as straight as possible. The back of the neck should lie flat against the floor.



To come down from the pose, gently lower the legs slightly over the head, thereby shifting the weight from the elbows. Replace the forearms on the floor behind your body. Bring down the trunk slowly and then the legs. Breathe normally while retaining the pose. There will be a brief retention of breath while lifting the legs up and then bringing them down.

Time: Repeat twice, retaining the pose for 1 minute to begin with. Add half-a-minute to each retention every week. Gradually reduce the repetition and try to retain the pose just once for a duration of 10 minutes.

Benefits: This is one of the most important Yoga postures. It rejuvenates the entire body. Because you have been upside-down and breathing properly, you have toned up the endocrine glands, reversed the influence of gravity on the internal organs, stretched the ligaments and muscles of the cervical region, strengthened the back, stimulated circulation and restored energy. Sarvangasana is a blood, nerve and digestive tonic. Amongst the varied effects achieved, the one upon the thyroid gland, located in the neck, is important. The pressure of the chin against the chest stimulates the thyroid gland to produce more of the hormones that regulate the metabolism. Since the metabolism determines the rate at which the body uses food and oxygen, an active and properly functioning thyroid will keep your mind alert and your weight under control. Sarvangasana is the most effective posture for stream-lining both body and mind, for relieving minor ailments, tension and feelings of sluggishness. You can rely upon it to bring you a fresh outlook and a new enthusiasm for living. After a long ail-

ment, the regular practice of this Asana brings back lost vitality and vigour. It helps in curing asthma, disorders of the liver and intestines, dyspepsia, constipation, hernia, diabetes, varicose veins, insomnia, anaemia and many other diseases. Sarvangasana has all the advantages of Sirhasana without having any of its drawbacks. It beneficially influences the sex glands — in both men and women. Seminal weakness arising from the degeneration of the ovaries in women can be extensively controlled by the practice of Sarvangasana.

Points to Watch: Be sure to come down very slowly after maintaining Sarvangasana. To derive full benefits from this Asana, Matsyasana — ‘the fish pose’, should follow in sequence.

Do not do: If you have any serious medical problem including high blood pressure, low blood pressure, heart trouble, weak eye capillary or a middle ear trouble. People with slipped disc trouble or spondylosis, should also avoid this Asana.

Caution: Do not sit up immediately after Sarvangasana. Relax in Shavasana for at least as long as you have done Sarvangasana.

Paschimottanasana or The Forward-Bending Pose

This posture is called Paschimottanasana because it stretches the posterior muscles of the body. In Sanskrit, *paschima*

means 'the posterior' and *tan* means 'to stretch'

Technique: Stage I: Lie flat on your back. Stretch your arms over the head and alongside the floor. The upper arms should almost touch the ears. Stiffen the entire body, hold the breath and slowly raise the arms, head and chest simultaneously, assuming a sitting position and with the arms stretched over the head. After this, slowly bend forward, exhaling, and hold on to the big toes with the index fingers and thumbs of the corresponding hands. Retain the pose while breathing normally.



Stage II: Slowly try to bring the face towards the knees, to eventually rest it between them. The elbows should be bent, touching the floor on the outside of either leg. After a while, slowly rise and come back to the lying position on the floor.

If you find it difficult to sit up from a lying position, the pose may be done from a sitting position.

Some people may find it difficult to reach their toes with

their fingers. They can hold their ankles or place the hands even higher near the knees. Then the trunk should be bent forward as far as comfortably possible. Avoid jerks.

Time: Repeat 3 to 6 times, retaining the pose for 10 seconds at a time. Gradually reduce this repetition and try to retain the pose just once for 1 minute.

Benefits: This is an excellent stretching pose. It exercises nearly all the posterior muscles. Its contribution to circulation and to the tone of the spine, spinal muscles and spinal nerves is considerable. It builds a powerful abdomen. The abdominal muscles are vigorously contracted which ensures its better health and functioning. The stomach is flattened and constipation, dyspepsia and diabetes are benefited. Paschimottanasana increases vitality, helps to cure impotency and leads to a controlled sex life. This may sound exaggerated, but according to a Yoga source book, 'it cures all diseases of men'.

Points to Watch: Care should be taken not to allow the knees to bend, straight knees being essential for maintaining a full stretch of the lumbosacral region. The movement of the upper body is essentially forward. The spine should be stretched until the upper body lies almost flat along the legs. It is wrong to bring your head to your knees by rounding the shoulders and hunching the back.

Do not do: If you have hernia, an enlarged liver or spleen, or high blood pressure. If you have constipation, do not hold the pose for too long as it may aggravate it instead of curing it.

Halasana or The Plough Pose

Technique: Lie flat on the back keeping the hands alongside the body. As you breathe in, slowly raise the legs without bending the knees and the palms firmly on the floor. When the legs have been raised to an angle of approximately 90°, raise the hips and the lower part of the back, bringing the legs to a vertical position

Now, exhaling slowly, lower the legs over and behind the head and touch the floor with the toes. Maintain this position, breathing normally, and then slowly come back to starting position.



Time: Repeat 4 times retaining the pose for 15 seconds at a time. Gradually reduce this repetition and try to retain this pose just once, for a maximum duration of 1 minute.

Benefits: This is one of the finest poses to gain an elastic spine and healthy nerves, the main requisites to remain young. It is one of the best Asanas for normalising an obese figure and it rejuvenates the whole body. Halasana is second only to Sarvangasana (shoulder stand) in toning the thyroid glands. It is beneficial in curing enlargements of the

liver and spleen. It exercises the abdomen and prevents disorders of the stomach. It enlarges the vertebral forum (through which the spinal nerves pass) and thereby releases them from such pressure as may be inflicted on them due to improper carriage, occupational contours, etc. It is said in the scriptures, that a person who practices Halasana never feels lazy.

Points to Watch: Halasana keeps the spinal column elastic. But people who find their spine very stiff should start with the Asana slowly and without any jerks. Jerks may injure the rigid muscles or strain the shoulder and neck muscles. In the beginning, lift your legs only as high as you can comfortably.

Do not do: If you have cervical spondylitis or any pain in the neck.

Parvatasana or The Mountain Pose

Technique: Sit in Padmasana. Slowly as you inhale, raise the hands sideways and upwards, above the head. Press the palms lightly in a Namaskar Mudra and stretch your body upwards from the hips as if trying to reach for something above your head. Do not raise your buttocks and knees off the floor. The inside of the upper arms must touch the ears. Hold the breath and maintain this posture for 4 seconds. Keep the back straight, the stomach pulled in and the chest expanded. Attempt the maximum stretch upwards. Exhaling, relax the arms and slowly lower them to starting position.



Time: Repeat 4 times. If you can comfortably maintain the posture for more than 10 seconds, you may do so, while breathing deeply and evenly. In that case you can cut out the repetitions.

Benefits: Parvatasana stretches the spine upwards and in doing so corrects minor postural defects. Slipped discs get a chance to adjust back into place. It aids in slimming the body. The stomach is flattened and any flabby area round the waist and hips is made firm. The chest expands fully, breathing capacity increases and the lungs become stronger. Parvatasana also tones the nervous system and improves digestion.

Points to Watch: Pull the shoulders back a little in the final position. Avoid bending the arms at the elbows and wrists.

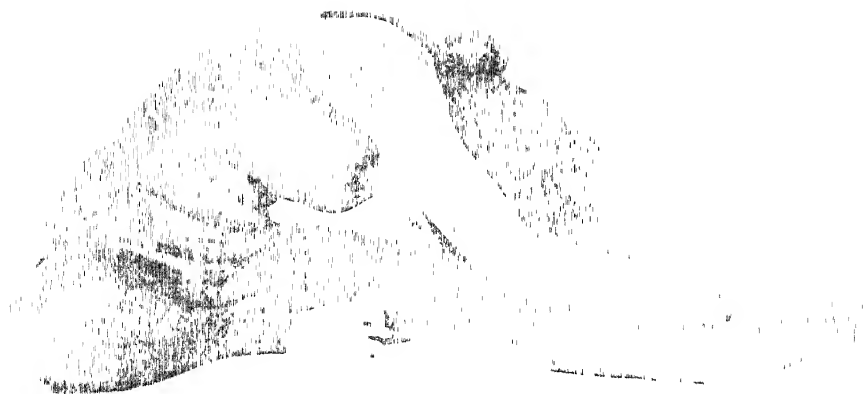
Do not do: None. This is a simple posture and everybody can do it. If you cannot sit in Padmasana do it in Sukhasana.

Janushirasana or The Head-to-Knee Pose

Technique: Sit on the floor with both legs stretched forward. Bend the left leg and press the sole of the foot flat against the inside of the right thigh, touching the perineum. Bend forward and hold the right foot with both hands. Try to bring your face to rest on the right knee. Breathe evenly. Retain the pose as long as you can comfortably do so. Take care not to let the right leg bend at the knee.

Slowly sit up straight and stretch both legs in front of you. Repeat the pose on the other side.

Time: In the beginning, repeat 2 or 3 times on each side, retaining the pose for 10 seconds. Gradually reduce the repeti-



tions and maintain the pose on each side for half-a-minute

Benefits: The abdominal organs are alternately contracted and stretched as the Asana is repeated on different sides. The leg muscles are also stretched and rejuvenated and pain in the knee joints is eliminated. This Asana strengthens the urinary bladder. People suffering from enlargement of the prostate gland will benefit. The liver and kidneys function better. Janushirasana flattens your stomach, reduces its girth and helps in evacuating the bowels. Digestion improves. It is often prescribed for women to tone up the muscles of the uterus, the fallopian tubes and to improve the function of the ovaries. This pose has a two fold effect on sexual life. In some it helps to control sexual energy and to maintain celibacy. In others, it improves sexual tone and performance.

Points to Watch: Both the knees should be firmly on the ground. For the first few days, people who have a big belly or stiff knee joints may feel some pain. In the beginning, it is easier to take hold of the ankle of the outstretched leg and pull yourself down a little.

Do not do: If you have ulcers or any serious lower back problem.

Ushtrasana or The Camel Pose

Technique: Kneel on the floor keeping the knees, thighs and feet together. Keep the hands on the hips and stretch the spine up and slightly backwards, pushing the chest forward. Breathe in and as you exhale, drop your arms back and place your hands over your heels. Place your right palm over the right heel and left palm over the left heel. Now throw your head backwards and down and push the hips forward and up. Keep the arms straight. The eyes may be kept open or closed. Breathe normally. Then return slowly to kneeling position.

Time: Ushtrasana should be done only once, for half-a-minute. No repetitions are advisable.

Benefits: Ushtrasana gives excellent exercises to the spine, shoulders and neck. It tones up all the muscles around the whole length of the spine. This posture also makes the chest firm and has a favourable effect on the ovaries, thyroid and other endocrinal glands. It strengthens the heart and the lungs. It cures hunch-back. Regular practice of Ushtrasana is good for maintaining all-round health and beauty.

Points to Watch: To obtain a maximum stretch of the spine, it is important to bend back from the waist, keeping the thighs and hips straight. Do not let the body slant backwards from the knees.

Do not do: If you have a frail constitution, inadequate stamina and find this Asana strenuous.



Note: Beginners should, at first, try the Asana with the toes tucked in underneath the feet, so that the heels are lifted slightly off the floor.

Ardha Matsyendrasana or The Spinal Twist

This Asana takes its name after the sage Matsyendra.

Technique: Sit on the floor with your legs stretched out. Bend the left leg at the knee and put the left heel against the perineum. Bring the right foot across the left leg and place it on the floor outside it. Grasp the toes of the right foot with your left hand, reaching out from the outside of the right knee. If, in the beginning, your hand does not reach your toe you can hold the right ankle or the right calf. Twist the trunk and the head around to the right, and bend the right arm across the lower back, with the palm outwards. Twist the trunk as much as possible. Slowly come out of the pose by first, turning the head and trunk to the front, then releasing the arms and finally uncrossing the legs. Then repeat the position on the other side and hold for the same length of time. Release and relax.

Time: This pose should be done once on each side, from 15 seconds to 1 minute per side.

Benefits: This pose twists the spine, laterally, on both sides and adds much to the flexibility of the spine and back muscles. It is very beneficial in chronic backache. Since Ardha Matsyendrasana compresses the alimentary canal and almost all the viscera, it improves the function of the liver, kidneys and pancreas; reduces abdominal fat and relieves constipation. Hardly any portion of the body is left unexercised and unstimulated.



Points to Watch: Take care to see that the chest is erect — do not droop. Keep the back as straight as possible, so that the spine, is stretched up while it is being twisted sideways

Do not do: If you have duodenal or peptic ulcers

Note: In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, one of the ancient texts on Yoga, Matysendra is mentioned as one of the founders of Yoga. It is related that while Lord Shiva was explaining the mysteries of Yoga to his consort Parvati, a fish near the shore heard everything with deep concentration. Shiva, realizing that the fish had learnt Yoga, sprinkled water upon it and immediately the fish gained divine form and was named Matsyendra (Lord of the Fish). He thereafter spread the knowledge of Yoga. Although of high spiritual and physical value, the original pose is very difficult to practise. Hence we have Ardha Matsyendra, an easier and more practical form.

Matsyasana or The Fish Pose

Technique: Sit in Padmasana. Slowly lean backwards, first on one elbow, then on the other, and lie supine on the floor. Bend the head backward, arching the spine and place the crown of the head on the floor, creating a bridge between the seat and the head. Hold the big toes by the index fingers and thumbs of the respective hands. Breathe deeply. While coming up again, shift the weight onto the elbows once more, lift the head off the floor, straighten the spine and slowly come up. Those who cannot do Padmasana may practise this pose lying straight, with the hands placed alongside the body.

Time: Repeat the Asana twice retaining the pose for 20 seconds at a time. Gradually try to retain the pose just once, for a maximum duration of 2 minutes.

Benefits: This pose is complimentary to Sarvangasana (shoulder stand) and relieves any cramp or stiffness in the neck caused by Sarvangasana. It builds up a healthy thyroid. The chest cavity expands to its maximum capacity and the lungs receive plenty of fresh air. It helps in the prevention of asthmatic conditions, sore throat and tonsillitis. The neck, brain, chest, spine, and stomach, all benefit. Matsyasana also contributes to the health of the sex organs, including the ovaries.



54. *Practical Yoga*

Points to Watch: Keep the mouth closed. If saliva collects, do not swallow, but spit it out after you have come out of the pose. If you feel like sneezing, coughing or yawning, come up immediately before doing so.

Do not do: If you have either an ear infection, or a middle ear problem.

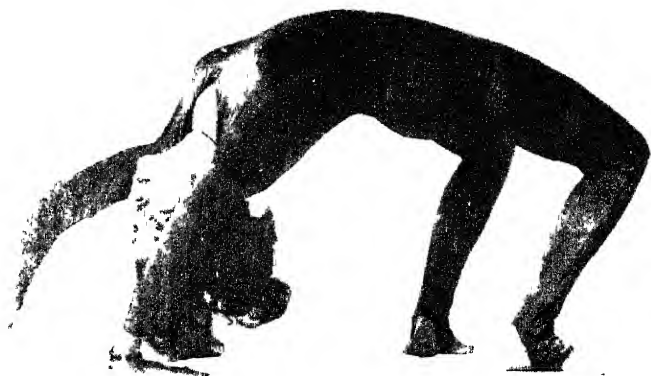
Chakrasaṇa or The Wheel Pose

Technique: Stage I: Lie on the back with the knees bent and the heels touching the buttocks. The feet should be about one foot apart. Bend your elbows and place the palms flat on the floor above the head, with the fingers pointing towards the feet. Slowly raise the trunk, arch the back and neck and rest the crown of your head firmly on the floor. The legs will form right angles at the knees.

Stage II: Supporting the weight of your body on your hands and feet, lift the head off the ground and raise your body to its fully arched height. To do this, you will have to straighten your arms. The legs may be slightly bent at the knees. Slowly lower yourself, first to the head-based position and then the spine position. Relax.

Time: Practise Chakrasana once a day and maintain it as long as you can, comfortably.

Benefits: Chakrasana is of special benefit to the entire nervous and glandular system. As the head is hung back, the thyroid, pituitary and adrenal glands are toned and hor-



monal secretions are regulated. The powerful backward bending of the entire spine makes it flexible and tones spinal nerves and muscles. Minor defects in spinal curvature are corrected. It rectifies displacement of the navel. A regular practice of this Asana immediately refreshes and recharges you as the circulation of blood in the brain and the spinal region is quickened.

Chakrasana gives exercise to several parts of the body in a short time. It strengthens the neck, shoulders, arms, wrists, spine, chest, pelvis, abdomen, buttocks, thighs, knees, legs and feet. It is recommended for prolonged youth and vitality.

Points to Watch: Avoid jerks. Do not hold your breath while maintaining the pose. Breathe normally.

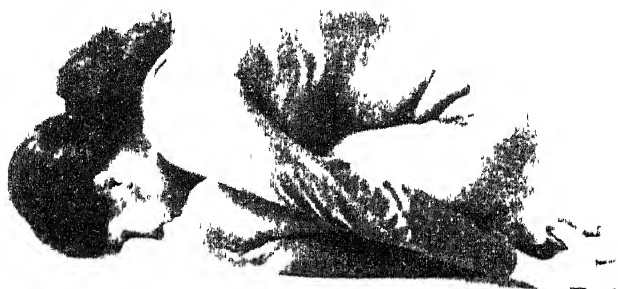
Do not do: If you have high blood pressure or coronary complaints, ulcers, hernia, or have recently had either a fracture or undergone medical operations.

Caution: Do not attempt this Asana on a slippery floor or mat. It is not to be done unless you have practised the preliminary backward bending poses for some time.

Note: Follow Chakrasana with a forward bending pose.

Sirshasana or The Head Stand

Technique: Stage I: Kneel on the floor in Vajrasana. Bend forward. Place your forehead on the ground and arms alongside the body. Take a few deep breaths.



Stage II: Then rest the forearms on the floor and interlock the fingers. The distance between your elbows should not be wider than the shoulders. Place the crown of the head on the floor, close to the locked fingers, so that the locked fingers can support the back of the head. Slowly lift the knees off the ground and raise the buttocks until the legs are straight.



Stage III: When you have raised the trunk sufficiently, you will automatically feel, that the feet can be lifted slowly off the ground, without any jerks. Lift the feet and fold the legs so that the heels come closer to the buttocks. Try to balance yourself in this position. Only after a few days practise should one proceed to the next stage





Stage IV: Slowly unfold your legs upwards till the body is in a straight line, at right angles to the floor. The weight of the

body should be distributed between the head and the forearms.

When coming down, reverse the order — fold the legs first, bring the thighs close to the chest and then place the knees and toes on the ground. Lift the head, take the forearms off the floor, and assume Vajrasana to rest awhile and harmonize the blood circulation. Breathe normally throughout the pose.

Time: Sirshasana must be practised in stages and it may take a long time to assume the final pose. When the pose is perfected, maintain it for 10 seconds to start with. Gradually increase it upto 3 minutes.

Benefits: All the activities of a human being, whether mental or physical, are governed by the brain. The whole nervous system which spreads throughout the body like a network of wires, is directly or indirectly connected to the brain. When you do Sirshasana, you send a rich supply of blood to the brain and thus maintain the health of the brain and of the whole nervous system. Sirshasana favourably influences all the endocrine glands, particularly the pineal, pituitary, thyroid and parathyroids. Our growth, health, and vitality depend on the proper functioning of these glands. The eyes, nose, ears, all depend for their proper functioning upon the different centres situated in the brain. Sirshasana exercises a beneficial effect upon the health of these centres and preserves the efficiency of these sense organs. The rich flow of blood to the brain cells rejuvenates them so that thinking becomes clearer. Memory improves. This Asana is a brain tonic. Digestion improves and constipation is cured. The lungs become strong, giving relief

from colds, coughs, tonsillitis, halitosis (bad breath) and asthma

I have observed that regular practice of Sirshasana shows a marked increase in the haemoglobin content in the blood. Visceroptosis, i.e., tendency of the abdominal viscera to drop into the pelvic region, due to weakness of the abdominal muscles is cured. Hernia patients also improve. It rids men of seminal weaknesses such as premature ejaculation and nocturnal emissions. In women, uterine and ovarian diseases are relieved. The practice of Sirshasana has an extremely beneficial effect on the body as a whole. That is why it is often known as the 'King of the Asanas'.

Points to Watch: Do not do Sirshasana after heavy exercise — allow at least 20 minutes to elapse. While going up or coming down, move both legs together — join the thighs, knees, ankles and toes. Never try to jerk the legs up to assume the pose. The body should be perpendicular to the floor and not inclined to any side.

Do not do: If you have aching or running ears, very weak eyes, high blood pressure or heart trouble. It must also be avoided by those who do not practice Yoga regularly.

Caution: You have to learn to stand on your head in the same manner as you learnt to balance on your legs as a child.

Mayurasana or The Peacock Pose

Stage I is also referred to as Hamsasana, or the 'Swan

Pose' The standard ancient text, *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā* says

धरामवष्टभ्य करद्वयेन तत्कूर्परस्थापितनाभिपार्श्वः ।

उच्चासनो दण्डवदुत्थितः खे मायूरमेतत् प्रवदन्ति पीठम् ॥३०॥

‘Holding the ground with the two palms, support the sides of the navel by the elbows and raising oneself, like a horizontal stick in the air — this is called Mayurasana ’

हरति सकलरोगानाशु गुल्मोदरादीनभिभवति च दोषानासनं
श्रीमयूरम् ।

बहु कदशनभुक्तं भस्मकुर्यादशेषं जनयति जठराग्निं
जारयेत् कालकूटम् ॥३१॥

‘Mayurasana soon destroys all diseases of the spleen and the stomach, wards off disorders of the humours, kindles the gastric fire and completely digests all the unwholesome and overeaten food — even poison ’

Technique: Stage I: For beginners. Kneel on the floor with the feet together. Separate the knees, lean forward and place both palms on the floor, fingers pointing towards the feet. Bend your arms at the elbows so that the elbows point backward and are together at the abdomen. Lean further forward and rest the abdomen on the elbows and the chest on the upper arms. The head should rest on the floor. Keeping the toes on the floor, stretch the legs back until they are straight. Raise the head. Stiffen the entire body like a bar resting on a fulcrum. All the weight of the body should rest

on the tip of the toes and the hands.

Stage II: Gently move the body forward with the help of the toes, thereby shifting the entire body weight towards the head. When the upper and lower halves of the body are in balance, the toes will automatically rise off the floor and the body will be horizontal to the ground. The whole body is balanced only on the palms of the hand.

To release the Asana, just place the toes and then the knees on the floor, before resuming the normal position.



Time: Beginners can stay in this pose for 5 to 30 seconds. Advanced students can maintain it for 1 to 2 minutes. Perform Mayurasana at the end of an Asana session. It should definitely not precede the inverted poses.

Benefits: Mayurasana is a panacea for all digestive and abdominal problems. It helps to expel intestinal worms, removes constipation and gas and helps to eliminate amoebic dysentery. The abdominal viscera are excellently toned. Even diabetics can do it with advantage. The appetite increases as this Asana stimulates the metabolic process. Toxins are removed. Mayurasana braces the body in no time and is more or less a tonic for general health.

Do not do: If you have high blood pressure, hernia, peptic or duodenal ulcers

Caution: Women should normally do only stage I. Do not jump or jerk in order to raise the legs. If you do so, you run the risk of dashing your nose on the floor. For safety's sake, place a cushion or pillow in front of your face.

SURYA NAMASKAR OR SALUTATION TO THE SUN

This is an ancient Indian system of exercise, which combines seven Yoga postures in a sequence of twelve movements. Five of the postures are repeated. Traditionally, Surya Namaskar is done facing the rising sun, with an attitude of worship. The *Vedas* say:

उदनादित्यः कृमीन् हन्ति ।

‘The rising sun destroys germs.’

आरोग्यं भास्करादिच्छेत् ।

‘Health must be got from the sun.’

Surya Namaskar is combined with Pranayama and Mantra. The original Sanskrit name, Sashtanga Surya Namaskar, means ‘obeisance to the sun with eight points of the body.’ The eight points are the parts of the body which touch the ground in the sixth position: two sets of toes, two knees, chest, forehead and the two palms. (See the gate-fold.)

Technique: , 1. Stand erect with feet together. Join the palms of the hands in front of the chest, fingers pointing upwards. Breathe in slowly and deeply. Then exhale.



**Om Arkaaya
Namaha**



**Om Savitrea
Namaha**

2. As you inhale, raise the arms over the head, keeping them alongside the ears. With feet firmly planted, bend backwards and look up at the hands.

3. Bend forward as you exhale, and try to place the palms flat on the floor on either side of the feet. The knees should be kept straight. Try to touch the knees with your face. Pull your stomach in.

4. Stretch the left leg back, bringing the left knee to the floor. The right foot remains between the hands with the knee touching the chest. Inhale as you do this and look up.

5. As you exhale fully, bring the right leg back to meet the left foot. The body now forms an arch, resting only on the palms and feet. Look at the feet. Try to keep the heels flat on the ground.

6. This is the Sashtanga position. Keeping the hands and the feet where they are, inhale, bend your arms and lower your body to the ground to touch it only with the toes, knees, chest, forehead and palms. The buttocks will be raised up a little.

7. Bringing the pelvis to the floor, stretch up the head, neck and chest and look at the ceiling. Hold the breath as you do this.

8. As you breathe out, lift the buttocks, push the head down and let the body form an arch again as in Position 5.

9. Inhaling, thrust the left leg forward between the hands, with the left knee touching the chest. The right leg is stretched back, with the right knee touching the ground. Look up and try to bend your head back.

10. This is a repetition of Position 3. Exhaling, bring the right leg forward and straighten out the knees. Place the palms flat on the floor on either side of the feet and try to touch the knees with the face.

11. Keeping the arms alongside the ears, stretch up and back as you inhale — as in Position 2.

12. Exhale as you bring the arms down. Join the palms in front of the chest as in Position 1

Time: Start slowly with 2 Namaskars and increase the number according to capacity. Do more in winter and less in summer. Quality is more important than the number. With a rest of 10 to 15 minutes, after Surya Namaskar, you should feel enthusiastic and exhilarated. If there is fatigue or depression, the number should be limited, not increased.

Benefits: Surya Namaskar has a beneficial influence over the entire personality. It is a complete combination of bodily postures and breathing, plus a prayerful attitude of the mind. To quieten the restless mind, Surya Namaskar can be done slowly. If however, the mind is in a dull or lazy state, Surya Namaskar can be performed quite rapidly, almost like a physical drill. This will make the mind alert. Those who wish to reduce weight should drink a cup of water into which a little honey is added, about half-an-hour before performing Surya Namaskar. Those who want to gain weight and strength should eat a mixture of ghee and sugar, drink a cup of milk and practise Surya Namaskar, about 30 minutes later.

Note: The general rules that apply to Asanas also apply to Surya Namaskar.

BANDHAS

The word *bandha* means 'to hold, to lock or tighten'. This exactly describes the physical actions that are required to perform these potent practices. Bandhas is a small, though very important, group of Yogic techniques. Various parts of the body are gently contracted and tightened. This has the effect of massaging, stimulating and regulating internal organs and nerve centres. Practising the Bandhas binds the Prana, or vital energy and directs or channelizes it towards different nerve centres and glands, thereby preventing dissipation. They generate tremendous psychic energy which is manifested in the physical realm also.

In the beginning, they are practised separately but once the technique is properly acquired, they may be used in conjunction with other Yogic techniques. When combined with Pranayama, Asanas and Mudras, they become extremely powerful practices.

Uddiyana Bandha or The Stomach Lift

Uddiyana means 'flying up', or 'soaring'. This Bandha is very similar to Tadagi Mudra. During this Bandha the abdomen assumes a concave shape.

Technique: Uddiyana Bandha can be done, either standing or sitting. To do it while standing, keep your feet a little

apart. Bend slightly forward, placing the hands on the corresponding thighs. Empty the lungs by a deep expiration. Then take a mock inhalation — expand the chest and keep the front muscles of the abdomen relaxed, so that the abdomen gets drawn in, forming a hollow. Pull the whole abdominal region, above and below the navel, back towards the spine and lift it up. Do not inhale while this lift is being maintained. Press the hands against the thighs. After holding the breath out for a few seconds, inhale and relax the contracted abdominal muscles. This is one round of Uddiyana. Take a few normal breaths and perform another round. You may slowly work up to 6 rounds, maintaining each lift from 4 to 20 seconds. The same technique is used if Uddiyana is to be practised while sitting.

Benefits: The *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā* describes this as the best of the Bandhas. Further, it is said: ‘Even if an old person practises Uddiyana as a matter of habit, in the manner prescribed by the Guru, he or she becomes young.’ This is a fine exercise for the abdomen. It is a gastro-intestinal tonic. It tones the nerves of the solar plexus. It relieves constipation, indigestion and liver troubles, reduces abdominal fat and strengthens flabby stomachs. It is good for people who have worms. Regular practice of this Bandha gives vitality to a lethargic person and tranquillity to an over-anxious one. For abdominal exercise nothing can compete with Uddiyana and Nauli. They stand unique and unrivalled amongst all systems of physical exercises.

Caution: Uddiyana should be practised on an empty stomach and an empty bladder. In the beginning, it may be done in front of a mirror. It should not be held beyond one’s

capacity. The moment you find that you cannot hold the breath out comfortably, release the muscles slowly to bring the abdomen back to the normal position. It should never be attempted while holding the breath in. Uddiyana is to be avoided in cases of ulcers and serious abdominal troubles. Heart patients should avoid it.

Moola Bandha or The Anus Lock

Moola in Sanskrit means 'root' or 'cause'. It also means 'anal region'.

Technique: Sit in any meditative posture. Siddhasana in which the heel presses against the perineum is best for men. Women may sit in Padmasana. Keep the hands on the knees. Keep your eyes closed and the body relaxed. Inhale. Now contract the sphincters situated at the rectum. Feel as if you are sucking the entire rectum upwards and hold it for a few seconds. Although the anal contraction alone goes to form Moola Bandha, in contracting the anus you will automatically contract the whole pelvic region. Hence, Moola Bandha is virtually an exercise in pelvic contraction. Then relax as you exhale. Moola Bandha may be repeated 8 to 10 times. Focus your attention on the pelvic region.

Benefits: Moola Bandha tones and massages the reproductive and excretory organs. It bestows tremendous energy. It helps in curing piles, fissures, ulcers and any chronic pelvic infections. It is an extremely beneficial ante-natal exercise. Moola Bandha also works on the central and sympathetic nervous systems by stimulating the nerve endings in and

around the anus. Moola Bandha and Uddiyana Bandha are excellent remedies for prolapses of the stomach, uterus and intestines. It has strong sexual aspects. For the renunciate, it helps to sublimate the energy of overt sexual expression into the awakening of higher consciousness. For the householder, it helps to solve sexual problems and to enhance, maintain and sustain a healthy sexual relationship.

Caution: Moola Bandha, if wrongly practised, can lead to hard constipation instead of curing it. Women who have delayed menstrual periods should practise it only under expert guidance. Moola Bandha should not be held for more than 10 seconds at a time. Take a few normal breaths between repetitions.

Jalandhara Bandha or The Chin Lock

The word *jala* means 'net'. It refers to the network of nerves in the brain and neck. *Dhara* denotes the action of pulling upwards.

Techniques: Sit in Padmasana or any other meditative pose. Breathe in deeply. Contract the throat. Then bend the head and neck so that the chin presses against the chest. This is the chin-lock. Maintain it as long as you can comfortably hold your breath. Then look up and exhale slowly. Jalandhara Bandha may be repeated 5 to 10 times. It is practised with Pranayama whenever the Kumbhaka (retention of breath) is done. It is also automatically performed in Sarvangasana.

Benefits: In Jalandhara Bandha, the closure of the glottis, the tightening of the neck muscles and the sharp bend of the neck all serve to put pressure on the carotid sinus, thus stimulating the carotid nerve. This has a tranquillizing effect on the brain. Thus Jalandhara Bandha is good for people who have a tendency to be tense, worried and mentally unstable. It lessens irritability and is a good preparation for meditation. It is helpful to people who have a double chin and also cures many throat ailments. It slows down the heart rate. It massages and tones the thyroid and parathyroid glands, thereby improving the functioning of the whole body.

Caution: Relax the Bandha while inhaling or exhaling. People with high blood pressure and heart disease should do it under guidance. If you have a very active thyroid, avoid doing Jalandhara Bandha.

Bandha Treya or The Triple Lock

This is a powerful combination of all the three Bandhas together.

Technique: Sit in any meditative pose, preferably Padmasana or Siddhasana, hands on the knees. Inhale and then exhale completely. Now perform Jalandhara Bandha, Uddiyana Bandha and Moola Bandha, in that order. Hold all the three Bandhas together for as long as you can comfortably keep the breath out. Then release the Bandhas and slowly breathe in. Take a few normal breaths and then repeat Bandha Treya. During Pranayama, Bandha Treya,



also known as Maha Bandha, may be done after inhalation.

Benefits: Bandha Treya combines all the benefits of the three individual Bandhas. The whole body is charged with vital energy. It is said to aid in awakening the psychic force, the Kundalini.

Caution: One should not attempt Bandha Treya until each of the other Bandhas have been mastered individually. The precautions that apply to the Bandhas also apply to Bandha Treya.

MUDRAS

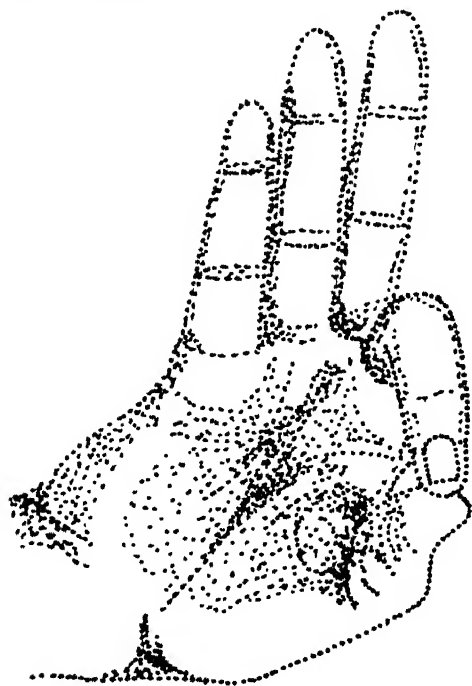
Mudras are static psycho-physiological, neuro-muscular control practices which form an important part of Yoga. The *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā* lists only 12 Mudras, whereas the *Gherand Samhita* lists 25. Some of these are to be learnt only under the guidance of a Guru. Mudra means 'seal' or 'symbol'. The root meaning of the word Mudra is that which gives almost immediately a sense of well being and happiness. Such results are claimed in Yogic literature for many Mudras and Bandhas. It does seem that due to the pressure manipulations, Mudras directly affect the working of certain endocrinal glands, bringing about certain marked changes in the endocrinal balance and thus, in the state of the mind.

While practising Mudras, one tries to control certain semi-voluntary muscles of the pelvic floor or throat, diaphragm, eye-balls, etc. The contractions and relaxations, or manipulations of internal pressure, are devised for temporarily shutting off or stimulating some specific parts of the body. This influences the activity of the autonomic nervous system.

Mudras also tone up the internal organs, help to decongest them and to stimulate them to health and activity. Many of the Mudras are a powerful combination of different Asanas, Bandhas and Pranayamas, which are put together to form one practice. Although Mudras give definite physical benefits, they are primarily spiritual and mental in purpose.

Chin Mudra or The Symbol of Consciousness

Technique: Sit in any meditative pose, preferably Padmasana. Rest the hands on the corresponding knees, palms upturned and fingers stretched out. Touch the tip of the thumb with the tip of the index finger to form a small circle. The other three fingers are stretched out, but not stiff, pointing slightly downwards.

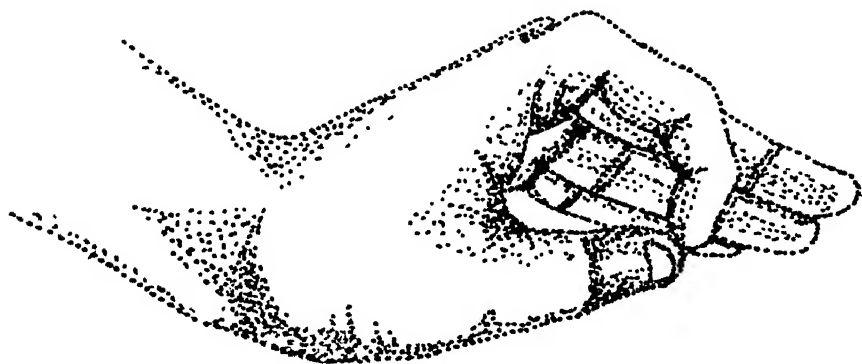


Time: Chin Mudra should be maintained as long as one sits in any meditative pose. It is also used during Pranayama.

Benefits: In Yoga, all the fingers have names and represent certain energies. The thumb represents the higher or the

universal self, and the index finger represents the individual self. So the union of the universal and individual selves is symbolized in this Mudra. Besides, the joining of these two fingers makes an energy circuit which silences and steadies the mind.

Gyana Mudra or The Symbol of Wisdom



Gyana Mudra is performed in the same way as Chin Mudra. The hands should rest on the knees but the palms of both hands are kept facing down.

Yoga Mudra or The Seal of Yoga

Technique: Sit in Padmasana or Vajrasana. Position the hands behind the body and hold the right wrist with the left hand. Slowly bend forward to touch the floor, with the chin, then with the head. If you are in Vajrasana, you should feel the pressure of the knees against the abdomen. Exhale while bending forward, breathe normally while retaining

the Asana, and inhale while coming up. A variation of this Asana when done in Padmasana is to touch the forehead to the right and to the left knees respectively.





Time: Repeat this pose 4 times for ten seconds at a time. Gradually reduce this repetition and try to retain the pose just once for 2 minutes.

Benefits: Yoga Mudra deeply compresses the intra-abdominal region. It therefore tones up and builds strong abdominal organs, muscles and nerves. Constipation disappears. Displaced abdominal viscera are pushed back into place. Sexual organs stand to benefit. Yoga Mudra also stretches and tones almost all the posterior muscles of the neck and trunk and improves circulation of blood in the head. The face begins to glow. Pimples and skin eruption subside. When practised for a long time, it helps to awaken the Kundalini Shakti, or the latent powers within.

Caution: Do not do this Mudra if you have cervical spondylosis or a serious back problem.

Note: Bend forward gently, without straining or jerking the spinal column. Do not lift your buttocks off the floor.

Viparitakarni Mudra or The Inverted Seal

Viparit means 'inverted' and *karni* means 'action'.

Technique: Lie on the back with the hands alongside the body. Gradually raise, first the legs and then the hips off the floor. Raise the forearms to support the back slightly above the buttocks, keeping the elbows firmly on the ground. This



Mudra is similar to Sarvangasana except that the chin is not pressed against the chest and the trunk is held at an angle of 45° from the ground instead of 90°

Time: This Asana should be practised only once, from ½ to 3 minutes.

Benefits: This Mudra renews the digestive fire and increases vitality. Yoga texts claim that grey hair turns black and wrinkles on the skin disappear by the practice of this posture for 6 months.

It is very beneficial to do abdominal breathing and Ashwini Mudra when in this pose. Congestion in the abdominal and pelvic organs due to pressure and gravitational pull is relieved. When the body is inverted they fall back in their natural position.

There is increased blood supply to the neck and head, and an increase in the activity of the lungs by nearly 50%. Viparitakarni Mudra may also be practised with considerable benefit in functional disorders of the digestive organs and the assimilative system, displacements of the abdominal organs, prolapse of the uterus, cerebral disorders, sexual debility, hernia and varicose veins. It is of special value to women who have a tendency towards abortions.

Caution: As there is 20 per cent increase in blood pressure and a 40 per cent increase in the pulse-rate in the first minute, it is necessary to relax in Shavasana for at least as long as you have stayed in this Mudra.

Daily practice of this Mudra increases hunger as the digestive fire is stimulated. This hunger, if not properly satisfied, may lead to emaciation of the body.

Ashwini Mudra or The Horse Seal

Technique: Contract the sphincter muscles of the anus for about 10 seconds. Then dilate them. Do this a number of times. Ashwini Mudra may be practised in any meditative pose or in any inverted pose like Sarvangasana, Viparitakarni or Sirshasana.

Time: It may be done as a part of your regular Yoga practice or at any other time of the day, except immediately after meals and before evacuation of the bowels.

Benefits: This Mudra is useful in releasing the spiritual forces dormant in the lower centres. It prevents the escape of vital energy from the body. Ashwini Mudra done in conjunction with the inverted poses is very effective in curing piles, urinary problems and prolapses of the stomach, uterus or rectum. It stimulates intestinal peristalsis, thus removing constipation. It is recommended for pregnant women and for men with an enlarged prostate.

Note: Ashwini Mudra and Moola Bandha are the same, except that in the latter there is no alternate contraction and dilation.

Tadagi Mudra

The *Gheranda Samhita* says: 'Draw the belly backwards so as to make it look like a pond. This is called the great Tadagi Mudra, destroyer of old age and death.'

Tadaga in Sanskrit means a lake. This technique is so

named, because in it, the abdomen assumes a concave appearance.

Technique and Benefits: These are the same as in Uddiyana Bandha except that it is done while lying down. Like Uddiyana Bandha, it can be accompanied by a contraction of the anus and the pelvis.

Yoni Mudra or Shanmukhi Mudra

Yoni Mudra has more to do with the mind and psyche than with the body. It is a powerful practice for withdrawing the mind from all association with sense objects. The senses are shut off from all external stimuli. In Sanskrit, this is known as Pratyahara.

Technique: Sit in any comfortable meditative posture, preferably Padmasana or Vajrasana. Raise the elbows sideways to shoulder level. Close the ears with the thumbs, the eyes with the index fingers, and press the nostrils lightly with the middle fingers. Then place the ring and small fingers of each hand above and below the lips to close the mouth. The spine and head should be kept straight, the chest slightly thrust forward and the abdomen under control.

After assuming the correct body position let there be a mental withdrawal, from all outer things and concentrate on inner sounds and visions.

Time: In the beginning, do it for 3 minutes. Slowly you may increase it to 20 minutes.

Benefits: This is really a technique of Nada Yoga and dur-



ing the practice you may hear various types of sounds of a divine and psychic nature. The source of the universe is primordial sound or vibration. This Mudra attempts to take your consciousness through all the different manifestations of sound until the most subtle of sounds can be experienced.

The inner quietude and calmness one feels has an elevating effect. It creates introversion and is beneficial for people who have problems due to a hyper-sensitive or aggressive and extrovert nature.

The control gained over the senses releases a storehouse of energy. Normally, we use only 10 per cent of our energy. 90 per cent of our vital energy is dissipated in worthless pursuits in and through the senses of sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. If this unnecessary dissipation of vital energy can be prevented through practices like Yoni Mudra, one can develop tremendously — physically, mentally, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.

Caution: The fingers on the eyes and nostrils should be placed very lightly.

Note: It is good if the practice of Kapalbhata (cleansing of the breath) Pranayama, Mantra Tapa, and an attitude of prayer and surrender to the divine, precedes the practice of Yoni Mudra.

Shambhavi Mudra

This Mudra is named after Lord Shiva whose other name is Shambu.

Technique: Sit in any meditative pose. Keep the back straight and place the hands on the knees in Gyana Mudra. Then gently direct the vision upward and inward, gazing at



the space between the eyebrows. Try to suspend the thought processes; feel that you are in contact with the divine or supreme consciousness and meditate on it. You may even bring a mental picture of your Ishta Devta or Beloved Deity, to the spot between the eyebrows known as Ajna Chakra.

Time: At first, do it for 1 or 2 minutes. With practise, you may slowly increase the time but be careful not to strain the eyes.

Benefits: This Mudra calms the mind and removes stress and anger. The external situation of stress may continue and cannot be changed. But with Yogic practices your reaction or attitude to stressful situations changes. Sham-bhavi Mudra also increases the concentration powers of the mind. It is one of the highly regarded practices in Yoga. One who practises it regularly can transcend the mind, intellect and ego and enter the spiritual realms of consciousness.

Caution: After the practice close your eyes till they are well rested.

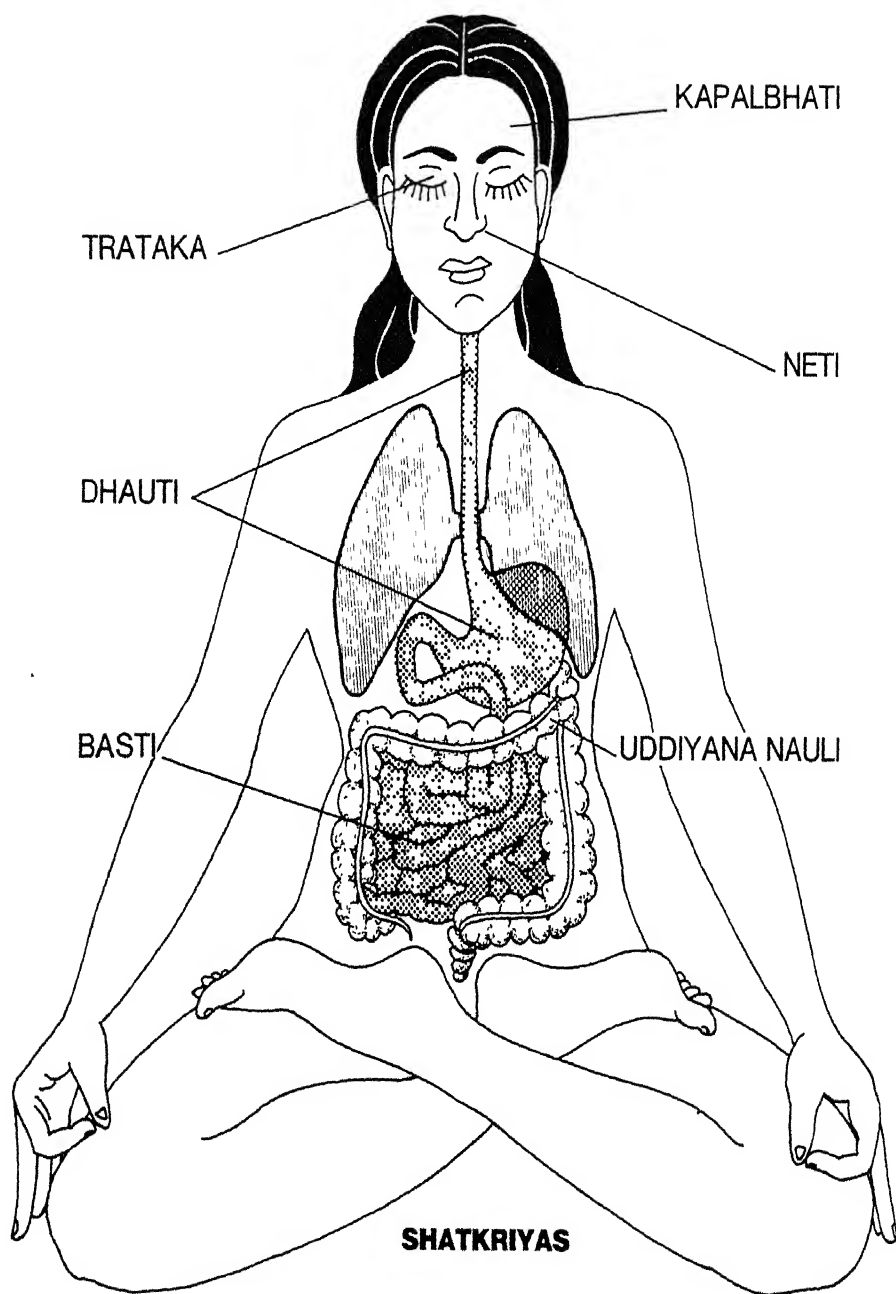
SHAT KRIYAS

Shat in Sanskrit means six and *kriya* means action. In Hatha Yoga, *kriya* means purification practice. The Yoga scriptures have waxed eloquently on these six purification techniques, which, when properly practised help in maintaining perfect physical health. All impurities and toxins which cause disease and premature ageing are cleansed out of the body. Without this regular cleansing, a person will not derive full benefit from Asanas. But it would be well to remember that cleansing processes are based on the concept of Nadi-Sudhi, Prana-Sudhi, Mana-Sudhi, and Chitta-Sudhi and, therefore, one cannot just think in terms of urea, uric acid and other such toxic materials generally described by the medical profession. Apart from the possibility of dealing with such toxic materials at a gross level, these cleansing processes seem to have a higher and subtler meaning and significance. Hence, their effect is not only physical or physiological; they also have their influence on the mental plane and it may take some time and require some practice on the part of the practitioner to realize this.

The six cleansing techniques are: Dhauti, Basti, Neti, Nauli, Trataka, Kapalbhati.

Dhauti or stomach cleansing is basically of three types.

- a) Jala or water Dhauti, also known as Kunjal or Gajakarni
- b) Vastra or Cloth Dhauti
- c) Shankha-Prakshalan or washing of the whole alimentary tract.



Dhauti

Jala or Water Dhauti — Gajkarni

Technique: Drink 5 to 6 glasses of lukewarm water quickly, preferably with a little salt added to it. Then do Uddiyana Bandha (stomach uplift) a few times to shake the intestines well. Lightly press the stomach with your hand, lean forward and try to vomit out the water. If the water does not come out naturally, insert the first three fingers of your right hand, far back into the throat and tickle the root of your tongue. This will induce a strong urge to vomit and the water will be thrown out in quick gushes. Wait for about 20 seconds and press the root of your tongue again. Repeat till all the water taken in has been thrown out.

Time: Dhauti should be practised in the early morning, on an empty stomach, after evacuating the bowels. In the beginning, it is good to practise daily for 2 weeks. Once the system is clean, it may be done once every week or fortnight

Benefits: I will first give two Slokas from ancient Yoga texts. 'He who practises Dhauti or autolavage gains health, strength and cheerfulness.' (*Gherand Samhita*)

'What is known as Gajkarni and what makes the body immune to all diseases is filling the stomach with water and bringing it up effortlessly. Just as an elephant draws in water through his trunk, and brings it out through the trunk, thus keeping his body free from all ailments, so can man keep his body free from all sorts of maladies. We clean a pot with the help of water; we can also clean our stomach with the help of warm water.' (*Bhaktisagar Granth*)

The stomach is one of the major organs that may cause various diseases if it is not kept clean and healthy. By this practice all impurities and phlegm in the upper part of the alimentary canal are washed out by vigorous gushes of water. Constipation, indigestion, acidity and gas trouble are cured. The kidneys are also flushed out — the large intake of water increases the efficiency of urinary elimination. In diseases of the chest, like asthma and bronchitis, Jala Dhauti is very beneficial. It aids in removing obesity. This process also clears the skin, removes pimples and boils. Headache caused by gastric ailments is cured.

Caution: Particular care should be taken to maintain the half bent posture. Do not purge yourself of the water in a standing position. Lie down and rest for at least 10 minutes before resuming normal activity and wait for 20 minutes before taking food. Apart from this there are no dietary restrictions. After this practice a bath should be taken only after 2 hours or more. If you have long nails be careful when you put your hand in your throat — it is safer to cut the nails short.

Do not do: If you have heart ailments or high blood pressure.

Vastra or Cloth Dhauti

Technique: Take a strip of fine muslin cloth, 3 inches wide and 15 feet long. The edges should be stitched in so that there are no loose threads hanging. Wash the cloth thoroughly with soap and water. Then sterilize it by boiling it for 5 minutes. For your practice, dip this cloth into tepid water and squeeze it out. Slowly, place one end of it in your



mouth at the back of your throat and start swallowing it till you swallow about one foot on the first day: Let it stay in for a few minutes. Slowly draw it out. Initially, you may feel like vomiting. Use your will power and drink 1 or 2 ounces of water. Even if you cannot swallow the cloth on the first day, continue the attempt. You may soak the Dhauti in a little milk or apply some honey on it to make the practice easier. Initially, Vastra Dhauti may seem a little difficult but once you learn to swallow it, you can swallow the entire 15 feet. Take care that about 8 inches of cloth remains hanging out of your mouth, so that it is easy to pull out. When you can comfortably swallow the Dhauti, it is good to drink a glass of water and practise Uddiyana Bandha and Nauli a

few times before the Dhauti is drawn out. Afterwards, the cloth should be washed with soap and water, dried in a clean place and kept rolled up like a bandage.

Time: It may be done once a week for general health. However, do it daily for 10 days if you suffer from asthma, colds, obesity etc. Thereafter, practise *Vastra Dhauti* on alternate days.

Benefits: The benefits are the same as those of *Jala Dhauti*. Only they are more marked. The inside lining of the stomach and upper alimentary canal is thoroughly clean — in fact, the whole passage from the throat to the stomach becomes clean. It is more beneficial in phlegmatic conditions.

Caution: Practice on an empty stomach only. In no case should the cloth be allowed to remain in the stomach for more than 15 minutes. In the case the cloth does not come out easily, drink a glass or two of saline water, then bend forward from the waist and slowly draw it out. Sometimes, due to the closure of the upper valve of the stomach, it becomes difficult to bring out the cloth. If it is painful to pull out the Dhauti, do not be rough. Just cut it from the remaining end that is left out and swallow the rest of the Dhauti in, with water. Do not worry about it because within 24 hours it will be thrown out of the system through the natural process of elimination, along with the excreta. You should learn this practice only under the guidance of an expert.

Do not do: If you have heart trouble, any serious lung ailment like tuberculosis, or diarrhoea.

Shankha-Prakshalan or Varisara Dhauti

Shankha means 'conch' and Prakshalan means 'to wash completely'. In this cleansing practice, salted water is made to pass through the alimentary canal with the help of certain exercises. In doing so, it washes out all the impurities of the system, from the mouth to the anus. This is a natural Yogic purgative. Traditional Shankha-Prakshalan is a little strenuous and should be performed only in an ashram, under a Guru's guidance. Strict dietary discipline has to be adhered to for days, otherwise, it can do harm. For the practical purpose of this book and for the man of today, I suggest Laghoo Shankha-Prakshalan or the easy wash of the alimentary tract, which is a simpler version of the Shankha-Prakshalan technique. It can be adapted to today's need with great advantage, and without fear of any harm. I have taught this to a large number of people in the last 10 years and find it one of the most beneficial and remarkable of all Yoga techniques.

Technique: Prepare 6 to 8 glasses of warm water. Add salt to it — about half-a-teaspoon of salt to 1 glass of water. Squatting on the floor drink 2 glasses of water as quickly as possible. Do the following 4 Asanas. Repeat each Asana 4 times on the left side and 4 times on the right side. Hold each Asana in the final pose for approximately 4 seconds.

1) Tiriyaka Bhujangasana

Assume the final position of Bhujangasana. Straighten your arms. Twist the upper portion of the trunk and head to one side and look at the heel of the opposite foot. Repeat, by turning your head the other side.



2) Tiriyaka Talasana

Standing with your feet together, interlock the fingers overhead. Stretch your body upwards. Then bend your body sideways, from the waist, first to the right and then to the left.



3) Kati Chakrasana

Stand erect with the feet comfortably together. Stretch arms sideways at shoulder level. Twist the upper part of the body to the right, swinging both arms also to the right and backwards. Then twist to the left.





4) Udarakarshanasana

Squat on the floor with hands on the knees. Bend the right knee to the ground and twist your trunk to the left. Twist your head also to the left and look back. Return to squatting position. Repeat by twisting the body to the right with the left knee on the ground.

When you do these Asanas, the valves and sphincters in the alimentary canal, between the mouth and the anus, will be pressurized to push the water downwards quickly.

After doing these Asanas drink 2 more glasses of the warm salt water quickly, and repeat all the 4 Asanas again. Then drink another 2 glasses of water and do the third round of the 4 Asanas. As soon as there is a sensation to pass stool go and evacuate your bowels. At first, solid stool will be evacuated, then probably stool and water will be mixed. Your bowels will be thoroughly purged and clean. You will also pass a lot of urine and your kidneys will be flushed. You should drink 6 glasses of water for easy Shankha-Prakshalan. Repeat the set of Asanas after every 2 glasses. Relax for 10 minutes before resuming normal activity. Wait

for half-an-hour before you bathe or eat anything. There are no diet restrictions for this practice.

Basically, this technique is the same as the traditional Shankha-Prakshalan. The only difference is that in the traditional technique you are supposed to drink 24 or more glasses of water, till the water that comes out through the anus is as clear as the water you drink. This means 25 to 30 motions, whereas in this adapted version, you stop after taking 6 glasses of water.

Time: This simplified version of Shankha-Prakshalan is harmless enough to be practised even daily, if necessary. Normally, once a week is sufficient. It should be done early in the morning, on an empty stomach.

Benefits: The whole length of the alimentary canal gets washed. According to an ancient Yoga text, Shankha-Prakshalan 'purifies the body which becomes god-like through constant practice'. But it is specially recommended for people suffering from constipation, gas, acidity, indigestion and obesity. It has a cleansing effect on the kidneys also and helps to prevent urinary infections and the formation of kidney stones. It has been found to be good for diabetes. A host of other ailments, having their roots in the digestive system, are cured. You will feel light and cheerful after this practice.

Caution: People with mild high blood pressure may also practise it, but they should use warm water without salt.

Do not do: If you have ulcers, severe heart conditions or nephritis.

Basti or Colon Cleansing

Technique: Squat in a bathtub or in a river, with the water up to the navel. Then do Nauli Kriya (isolation and rolling of the abdominal recti). This creates a negative pressure by which water is drawn into the large intestines. You may insert a small tube, about 4 inches long, in the anus to make this easier. As soon as the water is drawn, close the lower hole of the tube with your finger. Take it out slowly and stand up. Repeat a few abdominal churnings (Nauli) so that the water cleanses the lower colon thoroughly. By now you will have the urge to pass stool. When you do so, your bowels will become absolutely clean. This may be repeated 2 or 3 times. The third time, only clear water will emerge. The difference between enema and Basti is that the former is caused by water pressure and the latter by creating a natural vacuum. During enema, the colon wall gets stretched and if done regularly, it may not regain its natural shape. In Basti, the water moves inside without stretching the walls and it is not habit-forming like enema.

Time: The Basti cleaning may be practised in the morning — once a week or twice a month.

Benefits: The colon becomes clean and strong. Basti removes constipation and gastric troubles. It helps in curing urinary problems. According to *Hatha Pradipika*, 'Practice of Jala Basti invigorates the humours and the sense organs, gives a sense of well-being, bestows lustre, stimulates digestion and completely destroys all the accumulated diseases.'

Do not do: If you have fistula, a weak heart or appendicitis.

Caution: Practice on an empty stomach. Relax for 10 minutes after Basti and then resume normal activity.

Neti or Nasal Cleansing

If the nose is clogged or blocked it has an adverse effect on breathing and on the entire functioning of the body and mind. Closure of one nostril or partial closure of both nostrils is very common today, bringing on premature old age and a host of other diseases. All this can be avoided by the simple practices of Yogic nasal hygiene. A healthy clear nose is indispensable for one's well-being.

Neti is of two types.

1. Jala or water Neti
2. Sutra or string Neti.

Jala or Water Neti

Technique: Jala Neti can be practised in two ways.

a) Take a jug or any vessel with a spout which can be inserted into the nostrils with ease. Fill it with clean lukewarm water to which a little salt has been added — about 1 teaspoon of salt for half-a-litre of water. You may squat on the floor or stand. Now insert the spout in one nostril and tilt your head in the direction of the other nostril. Keep the mouth open and breath through your mouth. Water will start to trickle down through the lower nostril. After the water has been emptied out, fill the jug again and repeat the practice by inserting the spout into the other nostril. If the position of the jug and the angle of your head are correct, the water will automatically trickle down through the lower nostril. Now clear the nose out with quick and forceful ex-

halations to make sure that no droplets of water remain. Blow the nose dry by doing a few rounds of Kapalbhati. b) In the second method, you may dispense with the jug. Pour the lukewarm salt water into the hollow of your palm. Dip one nostril in the water by tilting the head a bit, close the other nostril with the forefinger of the other hand and sniff up the water with the open nostril. Use each palm alternately. The water will flow out through the other nostril or through the mouth. After you have repeated this practice on both sides, blow the nose, removing all the watery discharge by quick forceful exhalations.

Drying the nose, in both techniques, must be thorough to avoid discomfort and irritation to the nasal passage, which may even manifest the symptoms of a cold if not done properly. To do this, stand and bend your body forward at an angle of 90°. Breathe in and out vigorously while moving



your head right, left, up and down. Do this 10 times in quick succession to expel the maximum amount of moisture. Then close one nostril by gently pressing with the fingers and again repeat the vigorous breathing. Do likewise, closing the other nostril also. About an hour after this practice, it is beneficial to pour a few drops of warm ghee or sesame seed oil into each nostril. This is known as Ghrit Neti.

Time: For therapeutic purposes, Jala Neti can be practised daily; otherwise, once a week is sufficient. Neti should always be done early in the morning. Never do it before going to sleep.

Caution: When you begin this practice you may feel a little irritation in the nostrils or your eyes may water or you may start sneezing. But these will soon pass.

Sutra Neti or String Neti

Technique: Traditionally, a cotton string, stiffened with wax, was used for doing Sutra Neti. Nowadays, we use a thin rubber catheter — No.4 for ladies and No.5 for men. Sterilize the catheter in boiling water. Insert it into one nostril. Push it up gently with both hands. When the cord comes through to your throat, put your index fingers into the mouth and catch hold of the cord. Slowly pull it out through the mouth. Perform the same procedure by inserting the catheter through the other nostril.

Time: It should be done in the morning after Jala Neti — daily or once a week.



Benefits: Neti loosens the clogged up mucus and dirt that may accumulate and harden in the air passage and which act as nasal obstructions to respiration. It is extremely beneficial in cases of chronic headache, insomnia, hysteria, epilepsy, temper tantrums, forgetfulness and depression. It has a soothing and relaxing effect on the mind. It also aids in relieving colds, sore-throat and sinus. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* says: 'The practice of nasal cleansing purifies the air sinuses, invigorates the brain, tones up the optic nerves to improve sight and soon destroys the multitude of diseases in the region above the shoulders.'

Caution: If you have a deviated septum or if the nasal passage is very narrow, there is a possibility of some bleeding. If this happens, stop the practice; put a few drops of ghee in the nostrils and try again after a few days, under expert guidance. If the condition persists, call a doctor.

Do not do: If you have a deviated nasal septum or suffer from chronic haemorrhage in the nose.

Nauli or The Isolation and Rolling of the Abdominal Recti

The purification practice of Nauli is intended for regenerating, invigorating and stimulating the abdominal organs.

Technique: ‘Stooping a little forward, one should turn the belly swiftly from the left to the right and vice versa. This is called Nauli, which is the foremost of the Kriyas.’ This is stated in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, an ancient text on Yoga. But it is necessary to elucidate further. Nauli can be practised standing or sitting. A standing position is better and easier. Before you start Nauli it is necessary to master Uddiyana Bandha, i.e., drawing in of the abdomen towards the spine.

Stand with your feet comfortably together. Bend slightly forward and place your palms on the thighs. After exhaling completely, draw in your stomach. This is Uddiyana. To do Nauli, gently press the palms against the thighs and lift the abdominal recti forward to stand vertically in the centre. The abdominal recti (Nala) are the abdominal muscles which run vertically from the chest bone to the navel. These muscles are to be isolated and contracted while the rest of the abdomen is kept relaxed. This contraction can be effected by making a forward thrust at their lower end, which is situated about 2 inches below the navel. They will then stand out. This is called Madhya or Central Nauli. Hold this position for a while, keeping your breath out. Before releasing the abdomen, allow the abdominal recti to go back. It takes time and regular practise to perfect this technique. Failure in the initial stages should not discourage

you If you can do this after a month of daily practice, then your progress is good. After this has been mastered you may go on to do Dakshina (right) and Vama (left) Nauli.

Dakshina and Vama Nauli

By pressing the right palm, contract the right rectus and isolate it to the extreme right, while the left rectus remains fully relaxed. This is Dakshina Nauli. Similarly, you may put pressure on the left palm and move the recti in that direction to do Vama Nauli. Once you are able to do these you may go to the final stage. Churn or roll the rectus abdominis muscles so that they move from the left to the centre and then to the right in one smooth movement. Repeat this movement in quick succession, 3 to 4 times, keeping the breath out. Then relax the abdominal muscles and breathe in. When the respiration returns to normal, repeat the process, this time moving the muscles from the right to the left. Repeat 3 or 4 times. Relax.

Time: Nauli can be included in your daily routine to great advantage. It should be done without any strain either to the muscles or during retention of breath. After you have properly learnt the technique, you may do 6 rounds — 3 from the left to the right and 3 from the right to the left. An empty stomach is a must.

Benefits: Nauli is an excellent example of developing control over those muscles which we hardly use individually and of whose separate existence most people are not even aware. This is the most powerful method of removing abdominal ailments. It makes the gastro-intestinal system

healthy, relieves constipation, indigestion, improves the functioning of the liver, spleen, pancreas and kidneys. It flattens your stomach and regulates your appetite. The nerve plexus and their fine terminals in the abdomen are activated. The negative pressure created in the abdomen sucks up more blood and makes for greater awareness and control on the rates at which various substances can be ejected out of the abdomino-pelvic region, e.g., secretion of intestinal juices, evacuation of faeces, urine and other genito-urinary secretions.

Caution: Nauli is best practised under the guidance of a Yoga teacher. The stomach and bladder must be empty. People who have excess fat around the abdomen should practice Uddiyana Bandha for 3 months before attempting Nauli. It should not be attempted in the later months of pregnancy.

Do not do: If you have peptic or duodenal ulcers, appendicitis, hernia or high blood pressure.

Trataka or Concentrated Gazing

Your eyes, the windows of your soul, are intimately connected with your body-mind mechanism. Any physical or mental problem is immediately reflected in the eyes. The general health of the body can also become impaired due to visual defects. Fifty per cent of the energy of an individual is used in vision. The Yogic purification of the eyes, and through the eyes, the mind, is called Trataka. The word in Sanskrit means 'to look' or 'to gaze'. This is a psychosomatic practice.

Technique: Trataka can be defined as a fixed gaze at a point. It can be done on either external objects or on parts of your own body. When doing Trataka the whole of your consciousness must be centred in the eyes, to the extent that awareness of the rest of your body is almost lost. Externally, it can be done on a flame, a small dot the size of a coin, the rising or the setting sun, the moon or a star, a picture of your beloved deity or Guru or the eyes of a loved one.

When doing Trataka on parts of the body, normally the tip of the nose or the space between the eyebrows is chosen. They are called Nasagra Drishti and Brumadhya Drishti respectively.

Sun-Gazing

Sun worship, which was a part of religion in ancient India, has a deep meaning. Sun-gazing is very good for the eyes. In the early morning, when the sun has just risen above the horizon, stand facing the sun. Keep your eyes wide open but relaxed and gaze at the sun without blinking as long as you comfortably can or till tears come to your eyes. Then close the eyes but keep facing the sun. With your eyes closed, turn the iris to the left and to the right, upwards and downwards. Be aware of the after-image of the sun in front of the closed eyes. Open your eyes and repeat. Then cover your eyes by cupping the palm over them. Relax. This practice may also be done when the sun is setting. The best time for sun-gazing is early in the morning, between 7.00 and 8.00 a.m. or in the evening, after 5.30 p.m. Never gaze at the midday sun. It is harmful. Sun-gazing is an eye tonic. I have seen considerable improvement in eyesight when this practice is followed faithfully and with care. The ultra-violet rays of the

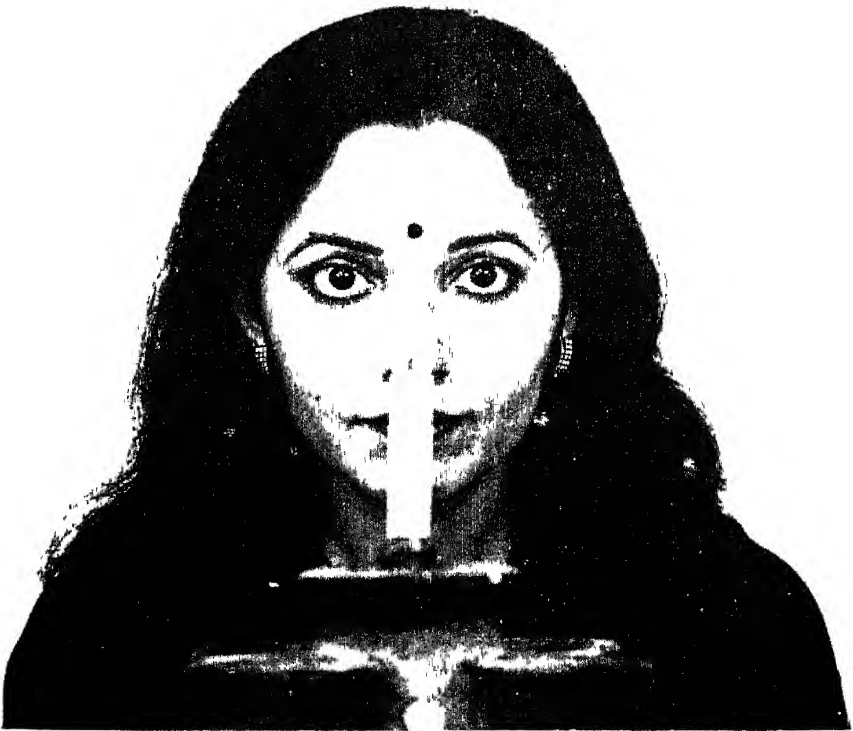
sun have remarkable therapeutic qualities. This practice is also good for sinus.

Moon and Star Gazing

These are also pleasant Yogic activities which have a soothing effect. They can be done on any cloudless night without fear of harm.

Trataka on a Flame

Trataka is also traditionally performed by gazing steadily at a flame. To do this, sit in a meditative posture in a dark room. Place a lighted candle or lamp in level with the eyes at a distance of about 2 feet. Then gaze intently at the brightest



spot of the flame. With some practice, you will be able to gaze at the flame for a few minutes, with total concentration, without blinking or moving the eye-balls. When your eyes start to water, relax and palm your eyes.

Normally, when people wear spectacles due to impaired vision, it is not because something is structurally wrong with the eyes but because of weakness of the eye muscles. They use the eye muscles unequally. One set of muscles may suffer due to over use and another set may be less used and weaker due to lack of exercise. This can be corrected by regular practice of systematic eye exercises, which will strengthen the muscles which control the eye-balls — specially the four sets of muscles which make the eyes look up, down, to the right and to the left

1) Brumadhya Drishti or the Eyebrow Gaze

Assume any comfortable pose and focus the eyes on the space between the eyebrows. Relax.

2) Nasagra Drishti or the Nasal Gaze

Fix your eyes on the tip of your nose. Hold for a few seconds. Relax. Alternate this with the eyebrow gaze mentioned above. Then cup your eyes with your hands.

3) The Right Shoulder Gaze

Keeping the body and head straight, move the eyes to focus on the end of your right shoulder.

4) The Left Shoulder Gaze

Finally, move your eyes to focus on the end of your left shoulder. Repeat twice, alternately gazing at the right shoulder and at the left shoulder.

While practising Trataka for the purpose of improving sight, have positive thoughts — that the vision is improving, all the constituents of the eyes are being stimulated and rejuvenated.

Time: Trataka should be done for 10 seconds on the first day. You may slowly increase the time upto 2 minutes. It can be practised at any time. An empty stomach is recommended so that concentration is intense.

Benefits: Physically, Trataka improves the eyesight. It corrects eye weaknesses and cures many eye defects such as inflammation, short-sightedness, styes, astigmatism, etc. Mentally, it develops the power of concentration to a high degree. From this, comes the awakening of latent faculties that are in all of us. It tones up the nervous system by relaxing the mind. The eyes are the doorway to the mind. When the eyes are fixed and unmoving, the mind also slowly becomes steady. Aspirants for spiritual enlightenment will also benefit by a regular practice of Trataka.

Caution: Avoid strain. Develop the ability for Trataka very gradually. After each practice, close your eyes gently and cup your palms over them. It is good to splash cold water on the eyes after the practice.

Do not do: As long as you avoid undue strain, there is no reason why you should not practise Trataka.

Kapalbhati or The Cleansing Breath

Kapal means 'skull' and *bhati* means 'to shine'. Literally, Kapalbhati means an 'exercise that makes the skull shine'. In effect, it is a forceful breathing practice that clears the nasal passages, air sinuses and the entire respiratory system. It also activates the nerves contained in the forehead and skull. Kapalbhati is an abdominal breathing technique in

which sudden expulsions of breath follow one another in quick succession.

Technique: Sit in Padmasana or Sukhasana with hands on the knees. Keep the chest expanded and the anus and pelvis slightly contracted. Take a few deep breaths. Then inhale lightly and make a short and sudden forceful expulsion of the breath, by contracting the abdomen in a rapid and vigorous inward thrust. This makes an impact on the diaphragm which gets raised in the thoracic cavity, expelling the air out of the lungs through the nose. This is immediately followed by relaxation of the abdominal muscles, which causes the diaphragm to descend and allow some air to rush into the lungs. Again exhale forcefully and then follow it with a passive inhalation. Kapalbhathi consists of forceful, quick exhalations and passive inhalations. With each exhalation and simultaneous abdominal contraction, you will produce a hissing sound. The continuous quick expulsions will sound like the bellows of a blacksmith. Practise 8 to 10 expulsions. Relax with normal breathing for $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 minute. Repeat.

Time: Do 3 rounds daily. In the beginning, one round consists of 10 expulsions with approximately 1 expulsion per second. Gradually, build up to 2 exhalations per second and make 30 expulsions, non-stop, in one round. Each round will start with a slight inhalation and end with an expulsion. It is important to first learn the technique correctly, concentrating for a few days on performance rather than on timing or speed. Relax between rounds.

Benefits: Kapalbhathi deserves a definite place in the daily

Yogic culture of every man who cares for his health. Its vigorous practice, even for a few minutes, makes almost every tissue, nerve and cell vibrate. One feels exhilarated, because of the increase in the intake of oxygen. It rapidly ventilates the lungs, giving them a thorough air-bath, and eliminates large quantities of carbon-dioxide. As traditionally believed, it makes the respiratory tract free of impurities, eliminating colds, mucus and phlegm. It is therefore helpful in many conditions of the lungs, throat and chest. The obvious massage of the abdomen has a beneficial effect on the digestive and circulatory system while removing excess fat and toning up the abdominal muscles. Kapalbhathi greatly affects the nerves and is practised for awakening particular nerve centres of physical and spiritual significance. It revitalises the body and mind, keeping one youthful and radiant.

Caution: If you feel a little dizzy while doing Kapalbhathi, stop the practice and take a few deep breaths. Do not hurry or strain your system. Keep the face muscles relaxed. I have seen people making ugly facial contortions while doing Kapalbhathi. This will add lines and wrinkles on the face.

Do not do: If you have high blood pressure, any serious lung or cardiac disorder.

PRANAYAMA

The Sanskrit word *pranayama* is composed of two parts. *Prana* and *Yama*

Prana may superficially be taken to mean breath, but actually it means the life force within each one of us and in all living things. The subtle manifestation of this life force is the breath — the motion of the lungs. If that stops, as a rule, all the other manifestations of life in the body also stop. Translating *Prana* as 'life breath' rather than as just 'breath' goes some way towards indicating its broader dimension. It is the power within breath — the vital force in every being.

Yama means lengthening, or 'restraint'.

The process by which the subtle or psychic *Prana* is controlled by the regulation of external breath is called *Pranayama*.

Prana

The word *Prana* has been used since ancient times and has been referred to in several places in Vedic literature. The *Atharva Veda* has compared the relation of *Prana* with the world of living beings to that of a father with his son, declaring that *Prana* is the fundamental basis of whatever is, was and will be. It is the sum total of all the energy that is manifest in the universe, in nature and within each one of us. Heat, light, electricity and magnetism are its manifestations. All physical and mental energy, from the highest to

the lowest, is Prana. Whatever moves or works or has life, is only Prana. It can be seen in the movement of the heart, in the respiratory function of the lungs, in the digestion of food, in the opening and closing of the eyelids, in walking, thinking, playing, feeling, and reasoning. In other words, in a human being, Prana becomes visible on the physical plane as motion and action, and on the mental plane, as thought.

It is Prana which links the physical body with the astral body. Prana is the force which connects consciousness and matter. When it is withdrawn, the astral body separates from the physical body and it is called death. It is this Prana we are trying to control by controlling the breath. To reach the subtle we have to take the help of the gross. Pranayama is not only breath control but the control of the muscular force activating the lungs. By controlling the breath — the external manifestation of Prana, we can control the subtle life force within. Breathing is the most important of all the body functions. We can live for weeks without food, days without water, but not even a few minutes without air. From the first faint breath of the infant to the last gasp of the dying man, life is but a series of breaths — a long story of continued breathing.

Importance of Correct Breathing

Health depends on proper breathing. Not only your physical health but your mental power, happiness and the ability to relax depend on how you use your lungs. It is very important to have correct breathing habits if you want to live a life of continued vitality and to be free from disease. The great sage Vashishta, in his *Yoga Vashishta* says, ‘... the wise should study the regulation of Prana if they desire to

suspend the restless activity of the mind and to concentrate. The regulation of breath brings all happiness, material and spiritual, from the acquisition of kingdoms to supreme bliss. Therefore, O Rama! Study the Science of Breath ' Even a little control of vital energy opens the door to almost unlimited power within, which you can channelize and direct at will. You can control your body, increase your mental, intellectual and creative capacity and speed up your spiritual development as well. You can bring yourself into harmony with nature and with everything around you. Every part of the body can be filled consciously, with Prana. You can send an increased flow of vital force to any organ or part of the body, thereby strengthening, energizing and relaxing it. You can also convey or transmit this vital force consciously or unconsciously, to another person who is weak or sick. This happens naturally, as naturally as water flows from a higher to a lower level. It may be done by touch or even from a distance. Prana is accumulated where our mind is concentrated. All the great prophets and personalities are a store-house of Prana. That is why many people flock around Gurus, saints and sages. You will notice, that in life, some people are more successful, more influential and more fascinating than others. What is commonly known as charm or a forceful personality is nothing more than the natural capacity of a person to wield Prana. Such a person unconsciously wields the same influence which Yoga teaches one to use, consciously, by the command of the will.

Effect on the Mind

The manner in which you breathe has an immediate and direct influence on your thoughts. By controlling your

breath, you can learn to control the mind. Erratic, irregular, obstructed breathing promotes restlessness; slow, quiet, rhythmic breathing retards the flow of thoughts and generally has a quietening effect on the organism. So the next time you feel uneasy, depressed, dejected or angry, take a few deep breaths. You will at once be filled with new vigour, energy and mental equipoise.

But unfortunately, most people breathe incorrectly using only a small part of their lung capacity. The result is seen in contracted chests, stooping shoulders and the terrible increase in not only the diseases of the respiratory system, but a host of other preventable diseases in general. The body and the brain are unnecessarily starved of oxygen, considering its plentiful supply in the air around us. An ocean of energy is at our disposal and through Yoga one can learn how to tap it.

Why should you practise Yogic Breath Control?

Breathing is basically a subconscious activity. If you silently observe your breath for a while, you will find that it is made up of two acts — inhalation and exhalation, following each other in cycles. Actually, after each inhalation and exhalation there is a state of pause, so short that it escapes attention. All these four, together, constitute one respiration which is normally completed in 4 seconds. In Yogic terminology, inhalation is known as *Puraka* and exhalation is known as *Rechaka*. *Kumbhaka* is the pause after inhalation and *Sunyata* or *Bahya Kumbhaka* is the pause after exhalation. On an average, we breathe 15 to 20 times a minute. In

a normal breath, one takes in and gives out about 0.47 litres of air. If you use a little force and inhale deeply, another 1.42 litres of supplementary air can be taken in. In addition to the normal exhalation, if force is used to exhale further, you can exhale another 1.42 litres of complementary air. Even then the lungs do not become completely empty. They still contain about 1.42 litres of residual air. Using some simple mathematics, you can calculate the quantity of air that can be inhaled after a long exhalation.

Normal Air	0.47 litres
Supplementary Air	1.42 litres
Complementary Air	<u>1.42 litres</u>
TOTAL 7 Pints.	<u>3.31 litres</u>

If you add to this the 1.42 litres of residual air, you get 4.73 litres, which is the average lung capacity. In another experiment, the average shallow breather was found to inhale about 0.50 litres of air, but the conditioned deep breather could draw in about 4.00 litres. So you can imagine the amount of extra oxygen and Prana that can be obtained by deep breathing — about 7 times the normal quantity. This means super-charging the body and mind with oxygen and Prana, which in turn increases your vitality.

Breath and Longevity

Yogic breathing also involves a reduction in the number of breaths per minute. Yoga believes that a life span depends largely on the way of breathing. A person who breathes in short, quick gasps is likely to have a shorter life than a per-

son who breathes slowly and deeply. It is further believed that a person's life span is measured, not in years, but by the number of breaths taken. Each person is allocated a fixed number of breaths. By making each breath longer, not only is the life span prolonged, but one also gains more vitality and Prana from each respiration. The ancient Yogis, who lived in the jungles, noticed that creatures with a slow breathing rate had long lives, while those with a fast breathing rate had a short life span. This has been corroborated by science today. Respiration is directly related to the heart. Slow respiration occurs with a slow heart beat, which in turn is conducive to a long life. To this may be added the numerous other advantages of deep, slow and rhythmic breathing on the mind-body complex. It is well to remember that a regular practice of Pranayama adds not only years to your life but also life to your years.

Air as food

People believe that eating at least 3 to 4 meals a day is essential for a healthy life. This is a wrong notion. Yogis hold that air is our most essential food. The lungs, not the stomach, are the life organs. If a person does not breathe correctly, no amount of food, nutritious as it may be, can keep him in good health for long.

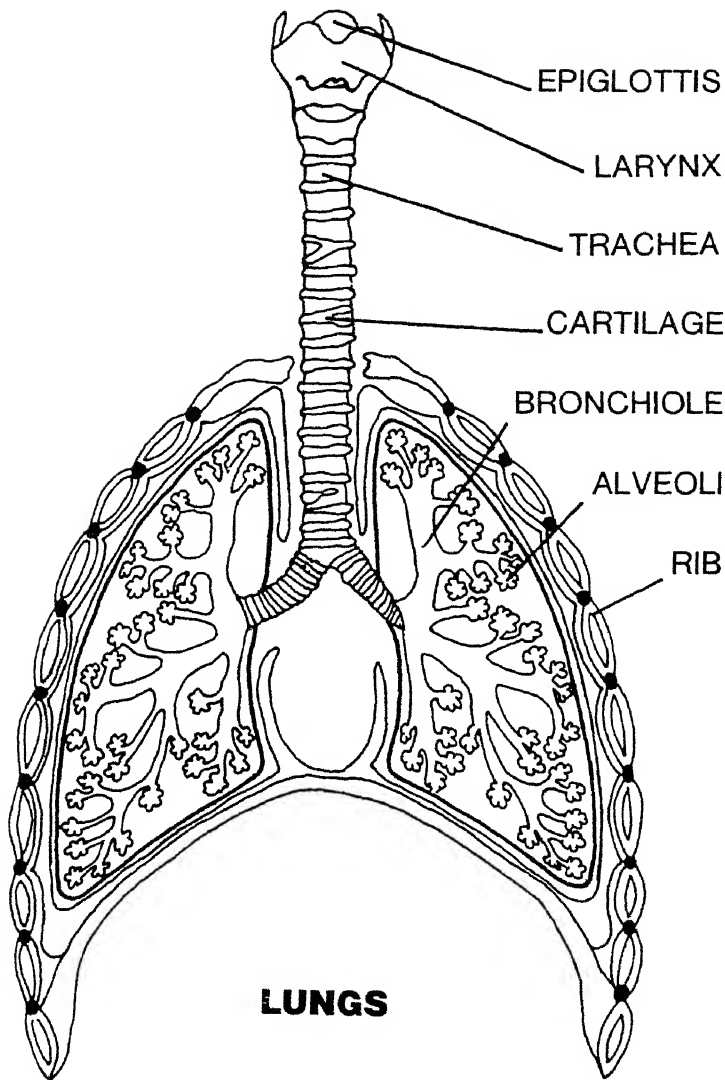
At Rishikesh and elsewhere in the Himalayas, I was struck by the admirable physique of the Yogins, who ate only a handful of rice a day. I also heard about some Yogins who never come down to the plains and who do not eat anything. They live on *vayu ahar* — air food! They roam about in the mountains during the severe winter with hardly any clothing. I do not recommend the practice, but these are

examples, and there are many such people who transcend the nutritional myth. I do recommend, however, that one should learn to slowly build the breathing capacity and to lessen the eating capacity. As one decreases the food intake and increases the intake of air into the lungs, physiological changes will take place. This will, among other things give a person the ideal figure — broad chest, flat stomach, narrow hips.

One should try to breathe in air of the highest nutritional value, meaning, highly charged with Prana or life force. The most vitalizing air is by the sea, on mountains, by lakes and in large open spaces and forests. Modern scientific investigations show that these areas, which Yogins associate with high concentration of Prana, have an atmosphere marked by negative ionization.

The Respiratory System

Since Pranayama deals with the respiration, it is necessary to have some idea of the respiratory system. When we breathe in, the air enters the nose and moves through the coarse hair of the nasal passage into a muscular tube called the pharynx. It passes through the flap-like opening of the **epiglottis**, into the tunnel of the **larynx** and then into the trachea or windpipe, which branches off into small tubes called **bronchioles**. These bronchioles terminate in minute sub-divisions in the small air sacs or **alveoli** of the lungs. The lungs are spongy and porous and their tissues are very elastic. The right lung has three lobes and the left lung has two. Each lung consists of an apex and a base. The base is directed towards the **diaphragm** and the apex is situated above, near the root of the neck. From the air sacs in the



lungs, the oxygen from the inhaled air, penetrates through the walls of the capillaries and is taken up by the blood. The air sacs are now drained of the pure oxygen and are filled with carbon dioxide — the waste product that has been gathered by the blood from all parts of the system. The lungs continuously expand and contract, filling the entire chest cavity, as they take in the air and exchange oxygen for carbon dioxide.

In the act of inhalation, it is the muscles that actually expand the lungs so that a vacuum is created and the air rushes in. The whole process depends largely on the respiratory muscles, the proper control of which will result in the ability to attain the maximum degree of lung expansion in order to absorb the largest amount of life-giving energy from the air.

However, it is important to remember that, unless the accumulated foul air is squeezed out from the tiny air sacs, we cannot bring fresh air to them. As long as the air sacs are filled with old air, no amount of strength applied in inhalation can bring in fresh air from the atmosphere. Ordinarily, we squeeze out only a little air from the apex of the lungs and the base of the lungs lies almost inactive, filled with stagnant air. Women err more in this way. Some people use only the base of the lungs for breathing, leaving the upper portion idle. This is one reason why Yoga emphasises deep exhalation and techniques like *Kapalbhati* so that a maximum amount of the old, stagnant air is thrown out and replaced with fresh air. When more air is squeezed out, more fresh air rushes into the lungs from the atmosphere, as there cannot be any vacuum in the air sacs.

How to Build Your Breathing Capacity

Three types of Breathing

In Yoga, to start with, three types of breathing are practised. This helps to build, singularly, the full capacity of the lower, middle and upper parts of the lungs. At a later stage,

all three are combined into one deep, long breath known as the Complete Breath. It helps if you can visualize the lungs as being divided into three parts. The three basic techniques have to be mastered before you go on to do any of the traditional Pranayamas. You must learn to bring into play the entire respiratory apparatus, every part of the lungs, every air cell and every respiratory muscle.

The three basic types of breathing are.

1. Low or Abdominal Breathing
2. Mid or Costal Breathing
3. High or Clavicular Breathing.

1. Low or Abdominal Breathing

This form of respiration is also known as diaphragmatic or deep breathing. It is best done in a lying position to start with. Place one hand lightly on the navel so that the abdominal movements may be felt. Inhale deeply and the hand will rise as the diaphragm flattens, pushing the abdominal contents down and making the stomach expand. The diaphragm, which is the main muscle used in respiration, is strong and large and it separates the lungs from the abdominal organs. The lower it moves during inhalation,



the greater is the expansion of the lungs. Therefore, more air is inhaled into them. Now exhale deeply and notice how the hand moves down on the abdomen. If you try to accentuate this contraction a little, the diaphragm will move higher and more air is expelled out of the lungs. The whole process is as if you are breathing with the stomach, expanding it gradually when inhaling and contracting it when exhaling. The chest and shoulders do not move. Of all the three, this is the best type of breathing. A *sadhu* once told me with rustic simplicity, 'If you breathe with your stomach, you will never fall ill.'

2. Mid or Costal Breathing

This is thoracic or chest breathing. In this form of respiration, the intercostal muscles are brought into action,



developing the capacity of the middle part of the lungs. It is best done in a standing position by placing the hands on either side of the ribs. Inhale slowly, expanding the chest or rib cage sideways. Exhale gently and contract the ribs inwards.

In chest breathing, avoid any movement of the abdomen

3. High or Clavicular Breathing

In this form of breathing, the smallest and the upper most part of the chest and lungs is used, and consequently, only a



small amount of air enters the lungs. The best way to open out and ventilate this part of the lungs is to sit in Vajrasana (Pg. 12) Stretch the arms straight up, then fold them and place the palms on the upper back. Breathing in this position will be shallow and the upper part of the lungs — the apex — will naturally come into action.

The apex of the lungs is often the most neglected and so contains most of the locked, residual air. It is often the breeding place for diseases like tuberculosis. Hence, it is necessary to activate this part of the lungs. But high breathing, when done singularly, as a habit, is the worst form of breathing. It requires the greatest expenditure of energy with the smallest amount of return.

The Complete Breath

After the above training you are now ready to take the deepest breath of your life — the Complete Breath, which is the way every one should really breathe. It is a combination of high, mid and low breathing, making it possible to inhale the optimum amount of air into the lungs and also to exhale the maximum amount of waste air.

Tèchnique: Sit on the floor in one of the cross-legged postures or sit on a straight-backed chair, keeping the back and head erect, the hands cupped on the lap or on the respective knees.

Breathing through the nostrils, inhale steadily, first filling the lower part of the lungs by expanding the abdomen. Then fill the middle part of the lungs by pushing the lower ribs outwards and broadening the chest. Finally, fill the upper part of the lungs by protruding the upper chest. The

shoulders may be slightly elevated. In the final movement, the lower part of the abdomen will be slightly drawn in. This is one inhalation. Though it is visualized as having three stages, there should be one continuous wavelike movement.

Exhale slowly in a similar, controlled movement. Holding the chest in a firm position and drawing the abdomen in, gradually lift it upward as the air leaves the lungs. Then relax the chest as the ribs contract and the collar bone is lowered.

Try to follow this procedure for every respiration. You will be amazed to find what a large lung capacity you have and how little it was being used.

Time: At first, the Complete Breath will have to be practised consciously for a few minutes everyday. It may even seem difficult to breathe in a gentle continuous movement. Eventually, however, the process will become automatic and will become the normal method of breathing.

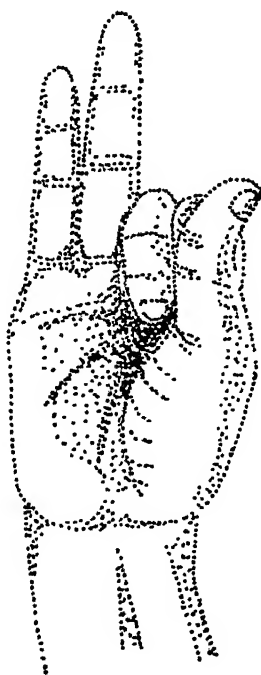
Benefits: Once the Complete Breath becomes a habit, the consequent changes are surprising. Susceptibility to illnesses, such as, coughs, flu, bronchitis, asthma, cardiac troubles and high blood pressure decreases. Vigorous breathing will spread a glow all over the body. Most colds can be cured by the Complete Breath and partial fasting for a day. Vitality increases tremendously and one does not tire easily. Thinking power increases as stress, anxiety and melancholia decrease. It is like a complete transformation in the personality. The Yoga system of Complete Breathing is of vital importance to every man, woman and child who wishes to be healthy. Its very simplicity often keeps people from seriously considering it, while they spend fortunes in

seeking health through complicated and expensive systems

Nadi Shuddhi or Nerve Purification

This is a Pranayama in which we breathe alternately through the nostrils. It is also known as Anuloma Viloma in certain texts

Technique: Stage I: Sit in a meditative pose. Watch the breath for a minute, with full concentration. Now lift the right hand and keeping the palm open close the middle and index fingers only. This is the Vishnu Mudra. Close the



right nostril with the thumb and, without straining, exhale as much air as possible slowly, through the left nostril.



At the end of the exhalation, slowly, without any jerks, start inhaling through the same left nostril. Take a deep, long, slow and steady Complete Breath. At the end, gently change nostrils by closing the left nostril with the ring and little finger and releasing the thumb. Slowly exhale through the right nostril till you feel that the lungs are empty. A slight contraction of the abdomen towards the end of the exhalation helps to expel the maximum amount of air.

Now repeat this practice by breathing in from the right nostril and expelling through the left.

This makes one round of alternate nostril breathing.

Time: Practise Nadi Shuddhi twice a day — morning and evening. Repeat 3 to 5 rounds, without straining.

Then take a few normal breaths and repeat the same number of rounds again. Gradually increase the rounds to 10. Note that there is no retention, nor any fixed time for the inhalation or exhalation in stage I of this practice.

Stage II: This is an advanced version of the above technique. You may now start measuring the time of your inhalation and exhalation. In the beginning, make sure that the exhalation takes a little longer than the inhalation. For example, if you inhale to a count of 6, exhale to a count of 12. The speed of the outgoing air is half the speed of the incoming air. Slowly increase the length of each respiration till you are breathing to a count of 12:24. For a few seconds after each inhalation, keep the breath in by doing Jalandhara Bandha. Keep Moola Bandha during the practice, sufficiently tight to control the movement of Prana in the lower centres of the body. The traditional texts also advise Brumadhya Drishti — fixing the attention between the eyebrows.

Time: Same as stage I, but work at stage I regularly for 15 days before going to stage II

Benefits: To understand the main benefit of this Pranayama you have to understand one of the basic concepts of Yoga — Swara Yoga. You may or may not be aware of the fact that you breathe through one nostril at a time. The right nostril predominates for an hour and fifteen minutes or so and then the left functions for a similar length of time. Just place your fingers one inch away from each nostril alternately and as you exhale, you will immediately know which nostril is functioning.

Medical science has not taken much cognizance of this fact as yet.

Yoga firmly believes that when breath is flowing through the right nostril — known as the Pingala or Surya (sun) Nadi — it has a heating and activating effect on the mind-body mechanism. When it is flowing through the left nostril — the Ida or Chandra (moon) Nadi — it has a cooling and relaxing effect as it slows down the mechanism.

Nadi Shuddi Pranayama equalizes the right and left nostril breathing and thus creates a balance in the metabolism. It harmonizes the breathing biorhythms and in doing so creates tranquillity, peace and alertness of mind, lightness of body, good appetite, proper digestion and sound sleep.

It has the effect of purifying the Nadis or nerve channels. Its ability to soothe the nervous system and to calm the mind will be apparent even after a little practice.

Points to watch: Before starting the Pranayama, see that both the nostrils are clean by doing Kapalhati and, if need

be, Neti. Do not make a sound during inhalation or exhalation. If you perspire rub the perspiration over the body at the end of the practice.

Caution: Those who have heart disease or high blood pressure must not practise stage II, i.e., retention of breath.

Note: Only after you have practised stage II of this practice, are you fit to go into further traditional Pranayamas that include retention. If you ignore this and start practising the other breathing exercises in a hurry, it may be dangerous for your health.

Traditional Pranayamas

There are 8 varieties of Pranayamas mentioned in the classic texts. For a person who does not devote a considerable part of his day to the practice of Yoga, it is impractical to undertake the regular practice of such a large number of breathing techniques, and unless they are undertaken with precise regularity they cannot fulfill their objectives and may even be harmful. I will, therefore, give here only two of the essential, traditional Pranayamas that will accomplish the objectives of this book. These can be perfected and practised with great advantage by the person who is serious about Yoga, but who, nonetheless, has only limited time, at his disposal.

Ujjayi or The Hissing Breath

This is also known as the 'Victorious Breath' for *jaya* means

victory It is an energy-giving Pranayama. The distinctive feature of this Pranayama is that the glottis is partially closed during inhalation and exhalation, producing an audible sound.

Technique: Sit in any meditative posture, preferably Padmasana. After a complete exhalation, inhale slowly and evenly while contracting the throat, i.e., partially closing the glottis, so that a continuous soft, hissing sound is audible. This sound should be of even pitch and intensity throughout. This partial closure means that the air which enters more slowly, is heard as well as felt, due to which better regulation of the breath is possible. Avoid friction in the nose. Inhale, expanding the lungs to full capacity. The abdomen is kept slightly contracted throughout, and the thoracic cage is expanded fully, a different emphasis from that of the Complete Breath. Perform Jalandhara Bandha and hold the breath comfortably for a few seconds. Then release the Bandha, close the right nostril with the thumb of the right hand and exhale slowly through the left nostril. Again the glottis is partly closed and you hear the regulated sound as the breath flows out. In Ujjayi, inhalation is through both nostrils and exhalation is through the left one.

Once perfected, this Pranayama can be done even while standing, walking or lying down. In the latter case, you need not perform Jalandhara Bandha and exhalation can be done through both nostrils.

Note: Advanced students may do Uddiyana Bandha and Moola Bandha during the retention.

Time: To start with you can practise 5 rounds of Ujjayi,

gradually increasing the number to 20 rounds in each sitting. Beginners should take exactly the same length of time for inhalation, exhalation and retention. The ratio is 1:1.1. For intermediate students the ratio may be 1:1.2 or 1:2.2, whichever is comfortable. Only advanced students should attempt the ideal ratio of 1:4:2

Benefits: Ujjayi invigorates and increases vital capacity, richly oxygenates and purifies the blood, improves thoracic mobility, broadens the chest, removes phlegm, improves digestion and tones the nervous system. The endocrine glands, especially the thyroid, are regulated. It is good for voice control. I have used it with good results in cases of stammering. Concentration of the sound produced during breathing calms and integrates the mind.

A traditional therapeutic claim is that it prevents and cures asthma and consumption. According to the *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā* 'It destroys the defects of the nadis, dropsy and disorders of Dhatus (humours).' The *Gheranda Samhita* says. 'All works are accomplished by Ujjayi Kumbhaka (retention). He (the Yogi) is never attacked by phlegm-disease, or nerve-disease, or indigestion, or dysentery, or consumption, or cough, or fever, or (enlarged) spleen. Let a man perform Ujjayi to destroy decay and death.'

When practising Ujjayi, if you wish to improve your physical or mental health, feel that each inhalation is recharging and revitalising you. While performing with a spiritual end in view, imagine that each breath is bathing your body with divine energy.

Points to Watch: Do not contract or pucker up the facial muscles. Do not breathe hurriedly or in jerks. The

breathing should be even throughout. Retention should never be done to the point of feeling uncomfortable or suffocated.

Caution: Persons with a weak heart or with cardiac disorders should never hold the breath. They can do this Pranayama lightly, without the retention.

Bhastrika or The Bellows Breathing

This Pranayama, which is extremely beneficial for the common man, is also held in high esteem by the Yogis. Bhastrika is claimed to be the best among the Yogic Pranayamas for arousing the spiritual forces and for preparing the practitioner for concentration (Dharna) and meditation (Dhvana). It is a beautiful combination of Kapalabhati and Ujjayi. In Bhastrika, the lungs are used like a blacksmith's bellows.

Technique: Sit in any meditative posture in which the trunk, neck and head are held erect. Padmasana is best. Palms should be turned down and rest lightly on the respective knees.

In the first stage, rapidly exhale and inhale with both nostrils, as in Kapalabhati, 15 to 20 times. Since you make use of the abdominal wall, focus your mind on the navel region. In the second stage after the final rapid breath, exhale completely and inhale, taking one deep breath and filling the lungs as in Ujjayi. Hold the breath and do Jalandhara Bandha. This is to be accompanied by Moola Bandha. Retain the breath as long as you comfortably can. Then raise the head up slowly, release Moola Bandha, and

let the breath flow out slowly and evenly through both nostrils. This constitutes one round of Bhastrika. The early breathing should be vigorous and noisy, though always with rhythmic timing, and the second stage, a model of smoothness and control. Rest for about 30 seconds, breathing normally, before starting the next round.

Time: I recommend 3 rounds for a person of average health. Since Bhastrika gives rise to heat in the body, practise early in the morning in summer. In winter, it may be practised twice a day.

Benefits: The benefits of both Kapalbhata and Ujjayi accrue from a practice of this Pranayama. Bhastrika brings heat to the body and has a purifying effect. It improves digestion, removes phlegm, and helps in curing asthma, tuberculosis and pleurisy. It improves the blood circulation and stimulates the entire body quickly. Appetite increases as it has the effect of 'fanning' the gastric fire.

Points to Watch: If you feel the slightest dizziness, stop the practice till it passes. Continue the next day. Though extremely beneficial, this is a vigorous Pranayama. Those with a fragile constitution or any serious disease should not practise it.

Caution: Start practising Bhastrika only after having practised Kapalbhata and Ujjayi daily for a month.

Note: The second stage of this practice may also be done by half-closing the glottis and making a hissing sound as in Ujjayi.

RELAXATION

From the alarm clock that rouses us in the morning, to the dreary conflicts on the news every night, we are daily bombarded by factors creating tension. Nine out of ten people suffer consciously or unconsciously from stress. They cannot find the time to relax and when they do, they do not know how to relax. They go around with the stomach nerves tensed up, faces contracted and frowning, hands stiff and unconsciously clenched and voices rising to a shrill pitch. When they go to bed, they lie with all the pent-up tension simmering in them and wonder why they cannot sleep. Those who do get to sleep often complain that they do not feel rested and refreshed when they wake up.

Relaxation is a conscious and deliberate process and should not be confused with rest which is often a haphazard affair. You can lie down and rest for several hours and get up quite unrefreshed. On the other hand you can be working hard and yet feel more relaxed than when you were lying in bed. Yogic relaxation gives the maximum amount of renowned strength and energy in the minimum amount of time.

Stress and tension have a devastating effect on health and cause premature ageing. Each one of us has his own ways of creating tension; it is a part of human nature. When these tendencies get out of control, the tension penetrates to the core of our being. Physical and emotional problems take root. Mental stress ultimately affects the performance of our body and in come insomnia, ulcers, heart attack, diabetes,

asthma, nervous problems, headaches, backaches, indigestion, skin complaints, high blood pressure — the list is long. All arise from deep rooted tensions in our mind and body.

When you are under stress and your muscles are tense, the free flow of blood is interrupted. When the flow of the blood is interfered with, the arteries, the blood pressure and the rate of breathing are affected — the result can be hypertension. Your adrenal glands, which release hormones into your body, saves your life by coping with stress. As long as you experience stress, the adrenal glands will continue to produce the vital hormones, cortisones and adrenalin. But, if the stress continues for too long, these excessive hormones can have a harmful effect on the body.

All Yoga techniques produce tranquillity — Asanas, Pranayamas, and meditation — all have a relaxing influence and this is widely acknowledged today as Yoga's greatest gift to modern man. There is not a single Asana that is not intended directly or indirectly to quieten the mind. The finest pose for deep relaxation, however, is Shavasana.

Shavasana

Whenever physical or mental fatigue is experienced, or when the mind is agitated, the practice of Shavasana is recommended by the Yoga authorities. It is a systematic method for introducing complete physical and mental relaxation. It is a Yogic tranquillizer. Though Shavasana should be done by all, it is particularly effective for people who are sick or weak — it rejuvenates the nervous system, awakens Prana (the life force) and has great healing power. In Shavasana, when we consciously try to relax the voluntary

parts of our body, energy is transferred to the involuntary parts. It is especially useful in overcoming psychosomatic diseases. Similar techniques are used in clinics and hospitals throughout the world. I, myself, have been often asked by doctors at the Nanavati Hospital to teach Shavasana to people after a heart attack — sometimes in the Intensive Care Unit, only a day or two after a heart attack.

Shavasana derives its name from the fact that in it, the body is made to lie down motionlessly, like a corpse. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* says, 'Shavasana means lying down with the back to the ground, like a dead body. It relieves fatigue and makes the mind still.'

The technique is simple to describe but not quite so easy to practise. One has to consciously withdraw all the voluntary nerve-force from the extremities and thinking part of the brain and to simulate death.

Technique: Stage I: Lie flat on your back. Stretch your legs so that the heels are a little apart and the feet fall limply outwards. Let your arms rest alongside the body, on the floor, the palms facing upwards and the fingers limp and slightly curled. A thin pillow may be placed under the head if it makes you feel more comfortable. Adjust your position so that you feel the least amount of discomfort. Close your eyes and relax completely. Give yourself some time to become calm and steady. As you breathe in, feel calmness diffusing through your whole body. As you breathe out say to yourself, mentally r-e-l-a-x.

Stage II: Become aware of sounds reaching you from outside. Do not analyse or intellectualize them — listen passively. Become aware of the most distant sounds that you can hear. Let your sense of hearing operate like a radar



beam, searching out distant sounds and following them passively for a few seconds, without attempting to identify the source. Gradually bring your attention to closer sounds, to sounds outside the building — and then, to sounds inside the building. Now develop your awareness of the room. Without opening your eyes, visualize the four walls, the ceiling, the floor, your body lying on the floor, in perfect stillness. Be aware of the meeting points between your body and the floor.

Stage III: Become aware of your breath. Observe your breathing which should be through the nostrils and not through the mouth. Feel the movement of the breath in your nostrils. Be aware of each incoming and outgoing breath. Your breathing will soon become smooth and of even rhythm. Feel the breath moving in the passage between the navel and the throat. On inhalation, feel the navel rising up, on exhalation feel the navel moving down. As you breathe in, feel the body expand as Prana flows to every cell and to every fibre of the body, healing where needed. As you breathe out feel the body relax — feel the outgoing breath washing away all the negative thoughts.

Stage IV: In this stage you have an option. You can just try to switch off the supply of nervous stimuli from all the parts of the body simultaneously and experience general relaxation or you can rotate your consciousness through the different parts of the body, first becoming aware of them, even tensing them a little and then relaxing each part

separately Conscious attention, or the nervous stimulus, is withdrawn in stages, from the 16 vital zones of the body. These are known as Marmasthana or sensitive zones.

Direct your attention like a torch beam over each and every part of your body, from feet to scalp, looking for tension and letting go of it. Look upon the various parts of your body as listening muscles, ready to obey your silently given command — which is simply — RELAX. Note, carefully, the sensation of tension and then the absence of tension. Think of tension draining away like a dangerous poison. You have to gradually withdraw your consciousness first from the tips of the toes, then slowly moving upwards, from the ankles, the knees, the thighs, the arms, the anus, the generative organs, the navel, the stomach, the heart, the neck, the lips, the tip of the nose, the eyes, the space between the eyebrows, the forehead and finally the brain. To be certain that you have allowed each set of muscles to let go completely, so that the ultimate state of relaxation is attained, repeat the procedure. Therefore, once again, very slowly and deliberately, direct your consciousness through your entire body, becoming acutely sensitive to all areas that may have tensed, however slightly. In this process you are playing a dual role — you are the instructor and the instructed.

Stage V: Become aware of your body again. Observe your breathing. Move your hands and feet slowly. Turn to the right and sit up.

Yoga Nidra

After stage IV, Shavasana can easily slip into Yoga Nidra — deep psychic sleep. Here, two more techniques may be added with great benefit.

Resolution

The resolution is a short, positive phrase which is repeated in the beginning and at the end of Shavasana. It is a direct order from the conscious mind to the subconscious, which at this time is very receptive and sensitive, so the resolve gets firmly implanted in the mind and can bring astounding results. This gives you the power to mould your mental structure — to shape your personality as you want. Often, we make casual resolutions to improve ourselves by overcoming some undesirable habits or traits. But we cannot work them out. The same resolution, when made during Shavasana, gets firmly established in the subconscious. The resolution is a positive auto-suggestion and has great healing potential. It should be short, pointed and deeply felt and should be repeated every time in exactly the same words, until it is a reality in your life. The following are a few examples. You can think of more according to your needs and inclinations.

I will attain perfect health.

I am changing consciousness, beyond disease.

I will be true to myself.

I will be positive and dynamic.

I will be cheerful.

Visualization

The brain is very receptive to visual imagery especially when the mind is introverted, after going through the above stages. A Yoga teacher can resort to all sorts of visual imagery to help the students after stage IV of Shavasana. Once

you understand the technique, you can create your own imagery.

You can visualize a protective cocoon around you. You can visualize a beautiful garden. You float on the clouds. Little drops of rain bathe, cool and refresh you. You can visualize and enjoy a lovely beach. You can visualize healing or psychic symbols in the Chidakash — the space you see in front of your closed eyes. I will give two examples.

a) Visualization of energy: After stage IV, become aware of your breath. Now imagine a large sun-like sphere of energy hovering over your head. As you breathe in, draw this energy through the top of your head. Let it slowly move into your whole body — let it pervade and vitalise your entire being. When it reaches the bottom of your feet let the excess slowly filter out through the soles of your feet.

b) Visualization of Perfect Health: After relaxing totally in Shivasana, visualize your body in a state of perfect health. The meditator visualizes herself or himself in a joyous, radiant state that to her or him represents perfect health. This may be any position or environment that, for you, is representative of a condition of perfect well-being.

Remaining in this totally relaxed state, with your eyes closed, form your image and maintain it steadily for at least 1 minute. If you are afflicted with an illness, visualize it as being healed by a divine light that encompasses you like an aura. This may be done several times a day.

Many people are constantly tense, even without being aware of it. We know when our bodies are ill and we take treatment, but when our minds are ill, we are unaware of it — leave alone doing something about it. The sickness

penetrates and becomes embedded in the deeper layers of our being. To avoid this, a few times a day, become as still as possible and let your body become loose. Check quickly for particular areas of tension and try to relax them. Are you frowning? Is your neck stiff? Are your hands even slightly clenched? Tense all the muscles in your body and relax them. To avoid becoming tense, take a break mentally and physically by getting away from the tension producing situation. Do Asanas and Pranayamas for 15 minutes and then a little meditation specially 'awareness of thought'. Become aware of your inner self and watch the tension dissolve. As skill in relaxation develops, you will find that you are able to let go of tension in a sitting as well as in a supine position.

Time: Shavasana may be practised any time you feel tired, tense or sick. Ten minutes of Shavasana during the day is equal to one hour of sleep. It may be practised before going to sleep. The whole body and the mind are more relaxed. Some people go to sleep reading stimulating books or thinking about some problems. In sleep their minds run on with the same thoughts or worries and their bodies remain tense. When they wake up in the morning they still feel tired and lethargic and find it difficult to get out of bed. Sleep, after Shavasana, is deep and refreshing. Besides, less sleep is needed. Shavasana will lead them from tranquillisers to tranquillity.

Relaxation after your daily Yoga practice session is essential. It will help to quieten the body and contain the energies that have aroused. If you do not relax for at least 3 minutes after a Yoga session you will be hyper-active. For therapeutic purposes, a duration of 30 minutes may be necessary.

Caution: You must come out of Shavasana slowly, otherwise, you may jerk your psyche. If you use a pillow, it should be thin. Do not use a thick pillow — this creates more tension in the neck and head.

Note: Since body temperature drops a little during the practice of Shavasana, you may cover yourself with a light blanket if you feel the need for it. You can cover your eyes with a piece of cloth, as light filters even through closed eyes. It helps to have a recorded cassette of Shavasana.

MEDITATION

There is a global interest in meditation these days. Modern man has become burdened with much stress and anxiety. He has gained materially but has lost his peace of mind. Meditation is looked upon as a means to get back that peace but the more talk there is about meditation, the greater is the confusion as to what meditation is and how one can practise it. Hundreds of techniques abound since times immemorial. Modern Gurus go on devising new techniques to suit today's needs. There is no single technique which is guaranteed to work for every practitioner.

No doubt, meditation today is more important, more needed than it was when Patanjali explained it. It is certainly no longer only for Sanyasins and recluses. It is for anyone who wants to become more alert in mind and body, even though he may be pursuing material or non-spiritual goals. What is required is that he should face his day to day life with the serenity, which comes from inner calm. Material happiness cannot be enjoyed for long with a sick body and an uncontrolled mind. If you want to get the best out of life, either spiritual or sensual, a few minutes meditation daily is almost a necessity today. Richard Hittleman an American Yoga enthusiast puts it: 'There is no endeavour in this life more meaningful, or of greater urgency, than the practice of meditation.'

Meditation enhances your capacity to enjoy, from moment to moment, all that comes to you. It helps one to live life to the full. Without a steady mind, no endeavour is suc-

cessful whether it be in the realm of study, science, arts, politics or even a harmonious day to day life. A mind that remains the same though environments may change is a steady mind. It is the key to any achievement.

Even the *Bhagavad Gita* states emphatically: 'He who cannot meditate must not expect peace; and without peace, how can anyone expect happiness.' But we are all identified by our ego and through that with the mind, body, senses and their activities. The ego, the I, is obsessed with action. It convinces us that through its actions we will be fulfilled in the external dimension that it has cunningly created and obstinately maintains. The deeper this hypnosis — identification with the mind, body, senses and their activities — the greater is the obscuration of our true identity and the more is our anxiety, suffering, frustration, despair, restlessness and insecurity. It is only by quietening the mind and senses through meditation, that one's self, one's true nature can be experienced. Only in this experience, which may be called Yoga, Nirvana, Enlightenment, the Kingdom of Heaven, Self Realization or whatever you may wish to call it — do peace, bliss and knowledge become a reality. Patanjali describes Yoga itself as cessation of the activities of the mind, or,

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥२॥

There are many meditation techniques to suit different people in various stages of development. Today most people meditate for peace. Some of the mental states that can be achieved through meditation are listed below.

1. Silence and peace.
2. Knowledge and power.

3. Bhakti (devotion and love) and joy.
4. Rise out of ordinary consciousness.
5. Open one's self to the divine force.

To gain the maximum benefits from meditation, however, it is important that the mind is gradually made a little free from the preoccupation with the world and its enchantment. This can be done by Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Gyana Yoga, Asana, Pranayama, Yama, Niyama, etc. It is important to remember that meditation is an inalienable part of a whole process of Yoga. When the mind continually craves for sensual stimuli, it becomes agitated and unable to concentrate. Vital energies are dissipated in fruitless and futile emotional relationships, affairs and infatuations — in involvement in movies, television, novels and in our own vanities.

Meditation is difficult but not impossible. Our minds are constantly externalized — our senses constantly bombarded by so many stimuli, that our finer perceptions have been dulled by these gross sensory stimulations. No one has achieved meditation right away. Only in rare cases may this occur instantaneously as a result of transmission of energy from Guru to disciple. In the beginning, your mind may revolt — it does not want to be subdued. It will create a number of excuses so that you do not sit quietly. Even when you do sit, it is a whirlwind. I come across many people who complain — 'I cannot meditate — my mind runs here and there' This is an inevitable part of the process of meditation. The technique of meditation is to keep the mind fully occupied on one thing. When the mind is fully occupied on one thing it is kept away from many things, and becomes quiet. Then you experience a kind of calmness and in that stillness even that one thing will slip away and there

will be nothing. It starts with Pratyahara — withdrawal of the senses. This gathering in process quietens the senses. You sit in a quiet place, close your eyes, and breathe lightly.

When you are trying to keep your mind fixed on one point, you will often see the mind run here and there. Whenever you become aware that the mind has wandered, bring it gently back to the point of focus. Again it will run to another thing; bring it back. This constant effort of bringing the mind back again and again to the point is what you call concentration. In Sanskrit it is called Dharna. You have not fixed the mind yet; you are trying to fix it. If that fixing of the mind becomes steady you are in Dhyana, i.e., meditation. But do not think that you are wasting your time if the mind is not controlled in the beginning. Yoga scriptures say that the control of the mind is even more difficult than the control of the wind.

Meditation can be done by narrowing down awareness to either of two centres: (1) the space between the eyebrows or (2) the heart. One does not concentrate on these spots but rather the consciousness is stationed at these centres during periods of meditation. People who are intellectual will relate better to the first, while those with an emotional nature will be more attuned to the heart centre. This is normally easier.

The *Yoga Sutras* describe Dharna as 'attention fixed on an object', Dhyana as 'union of mind and object' and Samadhi as 'transcendental illumination', where only the meaning of the object on which the attention is fixed remains. There is no stirring of thoughts or the blurring of the senses. The sense of ego disappears so that the person or seer becomes one with the seen. The mind is cleared of all distractions so that it reflects like a mirror whatever it is directed towards. This may be an object or one's inner self.

Meditation is the process of stilling the mind as the waves and ripples on a lake gradually subside until the surface is smooth to give a clear inner reflection. The incessant activity of the mind and senses, generated by their preoccupation with the things and conditions of the external world, is comparable to the ripples on the water that prevent us from seeing what lies beneath.

Meditation is of two types

- (1) Saguna, i.e., that in which you focus your mind on some external object that can be grasped through the senses; and
- (2) Nirguna, i.e., that in which the mind gets completely absorbed in itself. This is meditation without seed. You can start with the former and later, when the mind is steadied, switch over to Nirguna Dhyana

Aids to Meditation

Because 'going in' is not easy, Yoga often employs some devices or objects on which the meditator can anchor his consciousness. These may be Mantra, Yantra, psychic symbols or the visualization of a deity. Whatever these may be, they help one to achieve one pointedness and break away from the involvement in the play of the mind.

Mantra

Literally Mantra means 'revealed sound'. It is a safe and easy technique of stilling the mind. It is particularly suitable for those who have a restless mind and for those who are Tamasic or Rajasic by nature. Mantra is a sound or magical combination of sounds which have no specific meaning, but

create powerful sound vibrations. Each Mantra represents a particular aspect of the divine vibration. These sounds were revealed to sages and other pure beings in psychic states or in deep meditation. The entire creation is nothing but sound vibrations. The *Bible* says 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God.' Every scripture says something similar. The unmanifested essence of God is static, but with creation it begins to vibrate. The cosmic sound vibration is called Pranava. Pranava means a humming sound. This is expressed vocally by the word Aum or Amen, or Ameen. The real Aum is not only spoken but is felt within in deep meditation as the humming of cosmic vibration. The hum vibrates at different levels and gives rise to different forms. Sound vibrations create forms. Not only Yoga but even science says that. We and everything else in the universe are nothing but sound vibrations at different wave lengths. To commune with the cosmic sound is to have communion with what different religions call God. To have this communion, you have to vibrate at the same wave length as the cosmic sound vibrates. You have to become like a radio receiver and tune yourself to the cosmic wave length which is really all around you. It is to effect this tuning that the Mantra is repeated. Concentrated mental repetition of the Mantra produces vibrations within the individual's entire system which are in tune with the divine vibration. Once it is achieved you may even cease to repeat the Mantra and experience only pure bliss.

Mantra should preferably be short and it should be repeated at least when you wake up and before sleeping for 5 minutes. It is a powerful method of healing. I have met people who constantly keep repeating their Mantra throughout

their waking hours. Even if they wake up in the middle of the night the first thing that comes to their mind and their lips is their Mantra. When Mantra is repeated for some length of time it is known as Japa. Mantra, chanted loudly, is known as Baikhari. This is particularly suitable for beginners and when done in a group it helps the whole atmosphere to get charged with positive vibrations.

Mantra, when whispered, so that only the lips move but there is no sound is known as Upanshu. It is good for those who want to practice for long hours or when environmental factors prevent one from practising loudly.

The most subtle form of Mantra repetition is Manasik or mental Japa. It is said in the scriptures that steady and regular practice of Manasik Japa by itself can lead a man to enlightenment. Mantra repetition done this way throughout the day will occupy your mind when it is idle or pointlessly distracted. Repeat your Mantra while travelling to and from work — when you are walking or waiting for the train or bus. You have a lot to gain and nothing to lose.

Likhit Japa means writing your Mantra on paper. The letters should be small and beautiful. It should be combined with Manasik Japa. As you write your Mantra, repeat it silently. Likhit Japa is very good for children.

While practising Mantra Japa, thoughts will arise. In the beginning, it is impossible to be totally aware of your Mantra only. The other thoughts should be witnessed impersonally and not suppressed.

There is a whole science around Mantra, which has been handed down through generations. It is even referred to in Vedic literature. People repeat specific Mantras for the purpose of endowing themselves with added strength, to face a difficult situation, or to change their destiny. There are cer-

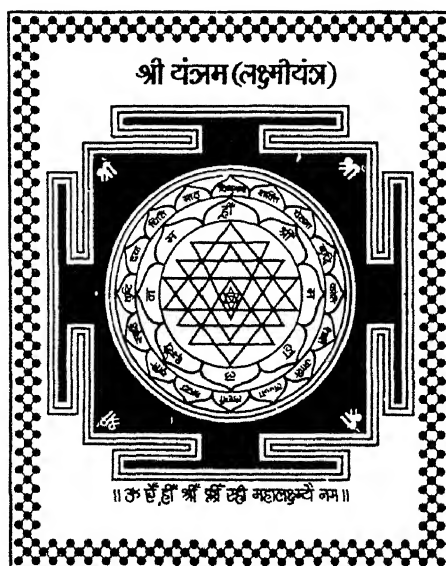
tain Mantras to bring about wealth, progeny, long life, protection against disease, to induce sleep, etc. Names, also have Mantric values. Each word or sound sets up its own characteristic vibration pattern. The vibration pattern of each person's name should be in harmony with that person. The best Mantra to use is a personal Mantra given by a Guru. If you do not have a Mantra it is perfectly safe to use the universal Mantra Aum

Yantra

Yantras are mystical symbols of higher planes of consciousness. When a person who is meditating anchors his consciousness on to a Yantra, he slowly becomes attuned to these levels of consciousness. The word Yantra is derived from the root *yan* 'to hold, sustain'. *Tra* means an instrument. Yantra, therefore, literally means an instrument of holding consciousness. Yogis in deep states of meditation experienced something in the unconscious levels of the mind. Upon returning to normal consciousness they expressed what they had experienced in the form of Mantras or mystic sounds and Yantras or symbols. The knowledge is intuitive and has emerged from divine planes. We all know that engineers first prepare a plan for the execution of a work and then execute the work with the blueprint as a guide. Yantras are like those blueprints in the realm of evolution. They are understood only by experts in the line. To the casual observer a Yantra is only a kind of geometrical diagram which is made of triangles, squares, circles, dots, etc. But the practitioner of Yoga slowly understands its significance just as only an expert can understand a blueprint. Aum may be used as a Mantra.

Even the cross that the Christians use is really a Yantra — it is a symbol of higher consciousness. First you have to absorb the Yantra through external visualization and then close your eyes and visualize it internally in the space between the two eyebrows. Each psychic Chakra in the body is represented by a Yantra. Since it is not possible to visualize the Chakra itself, concentration on it, is much easier if you can visualize a symbol that represents the Chakra.

Yantra may be specific or universal. A specific Yantra has to be specially designed for you by someone who knows the science. But a universal Yantra like the Shri Yantra can be used by all. If you put it on the wall or on your table, it im-



mediately starts working on your subconscious mind even without your realizing it. I was surprised to see beautiful multi-coloured stickers of the Shri Yantra being sold in New

York whereas no such things are available here in India. I had to carry one home from America!

In ancient days, Yantras were even used for healing. Later, somehow, they became associated with black magic and people viewed them suspiciously. There is no doubt, however, that they can be effective aids for meditation.

Mandala

Mandala means circle. Mandalas, in simple and complex forms, are centering mechanisms for the consciousness. They are like magic circles charged with cosmic energy. Every circle has a centre. Visualization on a Mandala creates a circle of energy so that centering results.

Ishta Devta

The powerful practice of meditation on a divine or saintly being or whatever you think of as God has come down since time immemorial. A small statue or picture is used or the image may be created mentally. This makes meditation easier and is more than childish fantasizing. It is not easy for the untrained mind to visualize God as the Supreme Being and concentrate steadily on the abstract. When we concentrate on a physical, concrete image of the Supreme Being as father, guardian, protector, we form a closer more intimate relationship and the consciousness is more quickly awakened. Here, we come into the realm of Bhakti Yoga. You can meditate on Jesus, Allah, Shiva, Divine Mother Kali, your Guru or whoever you feel drawn towards. The *Uddhava Gita* says 'The Supreme can be worshipped in whatever image or medium for which the worshipper feels reverence and devo-

tion, for being the Soul of the Universe, I dwell in all things.'

It does not matter whether you concentrate on the male or female aspects. But your deity should be related to you through your heart and not your intellect. This meditation usually begins with obeisance to the deity. Then you gaze steadily at the physical form. As you practice this you may simultaneously repeat your Mantra. This steady gazing progresses into clear mental visualization as you close your eyes. When you meditate on such a perfect divine being, you absorb the attributes of that being. You open a channel through which the perfect being can flow into you. You start becoming spiritual, just as when you turn your thoughts towards material things you become materialistic.

There is a difference between prayer and meditation. In prayer, we say, in effect, 'God, listen while I speak.' In meditation we say, in effect, 'God, speak, while I listen.'

Awareness of Breath

This method of meditation that Buddha used is known as Anapana — Sati Yoga — the Yoga of incoming and outgoing breath awareness. Breathing has deep roots in the being. You are breathing all the time but are not conscious of it. Breath is a link between your voluntary and involuntary systems. You can control your breathing to a certain extent; you can even stop breathing for a while but not for long. It goes on unconsciously. Even if a person is in a coma for months, his breathing continues.

Technique: Sit in one of the cross-legged meditative postures and direct your attention to your breathing. Exclude all thoughts and sensations and fix your consciousness



totally on the process of respiration. There is no need to change your breath. This is not a Pranayama. Just breathe consciously. Follow the air as it enters the lungs — feel it going in and out of your nostrils. Become acutely aware of the breathing rhythm. Do not miss even a single breath. Whenever this breath awareness is interrupted by a thought or a sound, passively observe and dismiss the interference and again focus your attention on the breath. When you are continuously conscious of your breath, thoughts will

automatically subside. If I say 'stop thinking' you will find it difficult. Breathing consciously has the same effect — only it makes the process easier. You cannot both think and breathe consciously. As soon as a thought comes into your mind you become unconscious of your breath.

As you move in with your breath, you will one day become aware of your centre of consciousness, right near your navel. You will also become aware of the little gap after each inhalation and exhalation. This breath awareness will create more energy, harmony and vitality in your being. The breath coming in and the breath going out are two things and if you become a witness, you are neither. In observing your breath, the source of your life, you become consciously aware of that agent which is responsible for creating, sustaining and terminating your life.

Sakshi Bhava

This means the ability to observe your thoughts and mental images in the same way as you would passively watch a movie. In this way, the unconscious mind unburdens itself by presenting its own visual symbols before the conscious awareness. This creates an automatic process of catharsis by which repressed psychological problems are first brought to the surface. They are recognised, then understood and finally dismissed — they are thrown out of your system. Gradually this brings about an inner purification and a state of calm serenity which pervades your whole being.

Technique: Sit in any one of the meditative poses. Now withdraw your attention from all outside stimuli and focus your awareness on the workings of the mind. Be aware of

any thoughts, images or experiences that come before the mind's eye. This is done in a detached way, without identification with these thoughts. Do not repress the thoughts. This creates an unnecessary mental tussle. Just be aware of them. Let them come and go. The mind has to purge itself of all sorts of experiences, suppressions, and its hoardings of useless, trivial things.

After a few days you will find that your mind is less crowded, thoughts have become fewer and fewer for they slowly subside for want of active support and the interval between two thoughts is lengthening. This interval in which the being resides in its natural state of Satchitananda is really meditation.

Once you achieve this it is reflected in your whole life. A subtle transformation takes place. Any problem can be solved if even for a few minutes, you are outside it and can look at it as a witness. But while you are identified with any state, this is difficult. While you are in anger, you become anger. In the *Upanishads*, this situation of a person watching himself is compared to a tree on which two birds are sitting. One bird is jumping, eating, enjoying and singing and the second bird is just sitting on the top of the tree looking at the other bird. If you can have a witnessing self that remains above and goes on looking at the drama of life below where you are the actor, your whole attitude to life will change. You become the seer—the observer. Problems disappear into nothingness. You are the cause of your miseries — you create your own hell and heaven and all your miseries vanish when you realize this. It is just like when you are flying in an aircraft over Bombay, the whole of Bombay can be seen — the whole pattern is visible. But if you are living in Bombay, walking in the streets, you cannot see it. Only

when you withdraw from Bombay will you see the city in its proper perspective. Similarly, those who withdraw, transcend and witness, can understand the fluctuations of the mind. Only then will the control of the flow of thoughts be possible. This helps us to tune within — to get in touch with ourselves.

Dynamic or Moving Meditation

Some Yoga seers today, teach a dynamic sort of meditation. This is the revival of ancient techniques. It may take the form of dances, rituals, selfless work, jumping, walking, etc. This releases suppressed feelings and emotions — it is a sort of catharsis and then meditation comes spontaneously. All movements, when continued to the point of exhaustion can lead us easily into the meditative state.

Meditation in Action

Once you achieve the state of meditation your whole life becomes a meditation. The habitual, mechanical, robot like personality changes. Any action done with total awareness, total involvement, is meditation. Then, you no longer have to 'practice' meditation. You are aware of the bliss, and the playfulness of existence. You are always 'here and now' To live each moment unburdened by desires, longings and expectations, is to live in meditation. To drift as a cloud is meditation. Then you are able to give each action full concentration and total involvement while at the same time maintaining relaxation and inner awareness. Once you learn to link your consciousness with its divine source,

every act is an act of meditation.

The Mother of Aurobindo Ashram says: 'Work done in the true spirit is meditation', and further, 'Let us work as we pray, for indeed work is the body's best prayer to the Divine.'

Time: The state of meditation may be constant, at least in some part of your being, throughout the day. Yet, in the beginning there have to be fixed periods for meditation. The best time is early morning-dawn, and in the evening-dusk. It may be practised from 5 to 30 minutes. One should try to have the same timing everyday because there is a rhythm in the movement of forces, spiritual and material. At the same time, there is a strong tendency for the right conditions for meditation to repeat themselves. The state of consciousness reached during meditation should be prolonged into the normal activities of life. One is fixed in meditation when one has to make an effort to get out of it.

Benefits: When we deal with the mind we are working on a very subtle plain. The benefits are also of an exceedingly subtle nature. But they do manifest in your whole life. It is a rejuvenation of the mind and body. When I started doing Yoga, I realized after a couple of months, that I was not getting angry as frequently as before. One of my students recently told me that she does not talk as much as she used to. There are other people who will come up and say that even their taste in clothes has changed or they do not feel like smoking much now or that they sleep better. These little changes, and there are many like them, are just the tip of the iceberg. They reflect the calm within.

A person who meditates can do his work more efficiently

and in less time than others. Many of the unconscious nervous functions are brought under voluntary control and can be manipulated to great benefit. Receptivity, awareness and clarity of thought increase. This is very good for students. Their ability to understand, memorize and retain knowledge is enhanced.

Psychiatrists are achieving fantastic results by employing meditation techniques in the treatment of various diseases. After serious experimentation American researchers have even incorporated meditation techniques in the treatment of cancer.

Although effects that can be monitored by scientific instruments are relatively few in comparison to those taking place during meditation, laboratory tests conducted by doctors of the Bihar School of Yoga showed that meditation:

- 1) decreased oxygen consumption (indicating relaxation and more efficient respiration)
- 2) lowered blood pressure.
- 3) relaxed the sympathetic nervous system, resulting in lower levels of stress hormones, adrenaline and noradrenaline.
- 4) increased electrical skin resistance (an index of relaxation).
- 5) cut production and build up of lactic acid — it is well known that people with high anxiety levels and a lot of tension in the mind also have a high level of lactic acid in the body.
- 6) slowed brain rhythm to the alpha level, indicating relaxed awareness and the absence of stress.
- 7) slowed the heart rate.

Even a few minutes of inner stillness transforms your whole life. There is no limit to the power of the human

mind, once you learn to link it with the cosmic mind. It is said that Dhyana (meditation) is more powerful than Gyana (knowledge). The Yogi may apparently respond to experiences in life but his inner stillness remains. He is happy. The *Yoga Vashista* says: 'For a Yogi who has found the treasure of eternal happiness, and whose intellect has stopped running after the objects of enjoyment, even the greatest empire on earth is nothing more valuable than a dry leaf that is to be shed. Such a person, even if he may be without a single coin in his possession, still obtains the pleasure that can hardly ever be obtained by an emperor.'

Caution: I have seen psychotics and people with severe mental problems sometimes worsen with meditation. When they try to sit silently, the flood of suppressed feelings like guilt, anger, fear, depression, frustration, suddenly surface and may even become uncontrollable. It is better for such people, to go through Asanas and Pranayamas for some time, and then start meditation under expert guidance.

There is an interesting story from Buddhist literature which will clarify the dangers of meditation for weak minded people and the necessity for suitable guidance. The Buddhists initiated a technique in which disciples meditated on the perishable nature of this world — old age, disease, decay, death, etc. They meditated on the eight different stages of the dead body. When any Buddhist monk felt sexually attracted towards a member of the opposite sex, he was told to meditate on that beautiful woman in her old age in a diseased, crippled, and hopeless condition and to imagine her body being burnt and cremated.

It is said that by meditating on these aspects many Buddhists got totally disgusted with the impermanent, bubble-

like nature of this world and they started committing suicide, one after another. Lord Buddha called a hurried meeting and immediately stopped meditation on inauspicious aspects of life. Even today, there are some schools of Yoga that have a meditation technique in which you die consciously — you imagine your body being burnt up in flames, the people at the funeral and such things. This has to happen sooner or later. But one has to be very careful in resorting to such techniques and weak-minded people should never meditate on them.

YOGA AND SEX

Thousands of years before Freud, the sage Vatsyayana had said 'There is no single human instinct that wields such a great influence upon an individual, in all capacities, at all ages, and at all times as sex'. Yoga masters were aware of the fact that a person's psychic, moral and general health depends largely on sex. It affects not only the reproductive organs but also the health of both the subconscious and the conscious mind. Sex emotions are the deepest emotions of human nature. They exercise an influence on every phase of development, and in one form or another direct the entire being of an individual. Sex is accepted as one of the four basic instincts common to man and animal. The other three are food, sleep and the instinct for survival. It is not surprising, therefore, that the culture which gave sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* to the world, also gave Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutras*. In fact, Yoga and sex are, in one way or the other closely connected. The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj* (union, to join). The same root *yuj* in *Samyojanam* means sexual intercourse.

No doubt, the first practitioners of Yoga were saints and recluses, withdrawn from worldly life, and Brahmacharya, in the context of 'abstinence from sexual intercourse', whether by action, word or thought was regarded as the highest virtue, but practical Yoga today, has much to offer the modern man who is not interested in adopting any such severe austerities. Though the *Siva Samhita* says that 'life is prolonged, indeed by the preservation of the internal secre-

tions of the sex glands', the authority on practical Yoga advocates that 'anyone can achieve complete success as the Yogin, even while living a wayward life' (*svecchaya vartamano api*). A passage in the *Mahabharata* also boldly asserts that 'even a prostitute can attain the highest object of life by following the course outlined by practical Yoga'.

Actually, spirituality and sex are different expressions of the same life force. The psychic energy of the body can be expressed or manifested in different ways including both



spiritual and sexual expression. There is a similarity between an intense religious experience and a total orgasm. Some of the claimants of the 'divine' experience describe this mystic religious bliss as a permanent and continuing state of orgasmal ecstasy. Each is often called a 'peak' experience, and creates a feeling of being one with the universe, of being swept out of the ego or mind. The losing of oneself in another with love and total surrender, the feeling of non-duality, describes the spiritual experience as well as the sexual union. Yoga allows you to direct sexual energy either upwards for spiritual development, or downwards to enhance sexual relationship. The keyword is control. Only when you understand the control mechanism can you monitor the sex instinct to give you happiness. You can channelize it at will. Techniques which give sexual control may be used to achieve Brahmacharya — sexual continence or to enhance sexual life depending on the nature of the individual. For the renunciate, Yoga helps to sublimate the energy of overt sexual expression into the awakening of higher centres of consciousness. For the average man, it helps to solve sexual problems, if any, and to enhance, maintain and sustain a healthy sexual relationship. This apparently contradictory statement has led to a great deal of debate, concern and confusion.

Transcendental Sex

As through the outward release of his sexual energy, a man can descend from his original spiritual state into body-consciousness, conversely, he can use sex to revert to the in-

tense experience of oneness that transcends individual identity. The doctrines centering around sex are called Tantric Yoga. Tantra is a system of self-development which accepts life fully, exalting experience without reservation and has no place for philosophical concepts like sin, which only serve to create guilt and other psychological complexes. Sex itself is used as a means for developing spiritual awareness and reaching the higher levels of consciousness. It is treated from four points: desire, ability, intercourse and sensation. According to Tantra, one cannot go beyond the sexual plane by denying it, but by understanding and accepting it fully. Only from such a base can one really transcend the sexual urge — only then will a spontaneous celibacy dawn effortlessly. Celibacy under duress or because of fear is no celibacy at all. To attempt an enforced renunciation of a perfectly natural and normal human urge is only a form of self repression and will lead to problems. Tantra maintains that the best way to master sexual enslavement is to witness and understand the senses and the reactions of the mind rather than to deny or suppress them. The senses are used in order to become aware of what is beyond sense modification. By realizing the true nature of the primal energy residing at the base of the spine, in the Mooladhara Chakra, your sexual partner becomes one of the gods and the sexual act, a symbolic expression of the union of Shiva (male-consciousness) and Shakti (female energy). Both, the man of the world and the renunciate are striving for this mystical union, but where the worldly man achieves union through a sexual relationship, the renunciate sublimates outer physical sexual expression to achieve inner union. The paths vary but the goal is the same — the transcendental union of consciousness and energy.

Once you understand the mechanism of sex, you realize that it is so much a momentary phenomena — it only functions temporarily. It is not a twenty-four hours affair. If you are aware and do not cooperate at the right moment, it passes off, it disappears. You do not positively suppress it — you only negatively do not co-operate with it. You may feel more happiness, than when the sexual energy is released. Wastage of energy is only a relief but its conservation is blissful. The feeling of emptiness that is overtaking the Western mind today, is just because of sexual wastage.

When a person makes a continued effort to conserve energy — not allowing it to move downwards as it usually does — enough energy is built up to make a thrust upwards. Energy needs to move continually. It cannot be static. Not much energy is needed to move downwards but to raise it upwards, you need a great storage of energy. As the quantity of the energy becomes more and more intense, an upward thrust becomes necessary and this activates higher centres of consciousness. Life energy going upwards becomes a great magnetic force. You become extremely attractive to others — people are irresistibly drawn to you.

For the common man today, who may not be interested in conservation of sexual energy, sex tempered with practical Yoga can be extremely beautiful. The whole act is different from the hurried unaware sexual union which is characterized by self gratification and lack of control and sensitivity. Quality, not the frequency of intercourse is important. The added ecstasy and depth of spirituality enhances the physical thrill and post-coital tranquillity acquires an element of the divine.

Even relationships like marriage take on a new meaning. When a man elevates a woman to the status of the divine,



gives her all of himself and adores her as such, and a woman reciprocates likewise, there emerges true harmony amidst daily activities and responsibilities. All actions become a channel for expressing love and devotion to the cosmic power as personified in the other. Only then can life be truly divine. In this process, higher potentials of the head and heart and true Yogic consciousness awaken within each partner.

Sex is pleasant because nature tends to make the essentials of living enjoyable. Since sex is necessary for procreation, it involves pleasurable sensations. To reach the utmost satisfaction in sex, however, and to maintain it, both body and mind must be healthy and work together. Yoga practices can help tremendously in this direction. Even a repulsive body, will become attractive with Yoga. The attraction is etheric. The thyroid and pituitary glands control the sex energies. The shoulder stand — Sarvangasana and Halasana, stimulate the thyroid and keep it healthy. All the inverted postures enrich the pituitary.

Uddiyana Bandha (stomach uplift) and Moola Bandha (anal contraction) relieve pelvic congestion, increase sexual energy and give good control in contracting and relaxing the muscles used in sex. It is very important, especially for women, to learn to contract and relax the muscles from the hips to the knees. When done regularly, this helps to condition the muscles of the vaginal wall, to tighten them and bring them under control so one can use them at will during intercourse, to increase sensitivity and give more pleasure to both partners.

Bhujangasana, Shalabhasana, Bhadrasana, Matsyasana and Sirshasana strengthen the pelvic muscles and directly massage and tone the generative organs. But the muscular activity that takes place in bodies during sex is hardly restricted to the pelvic region. Yoga helps in not only taking care of the sex organs but the entire physical mechanism.

Because they strengthen the waist and hips, and concentrate the mind, Yogic meditative postures are useful in building sexual energy and control. Excessive weight tends to reduce vitality, energy, endurance and perhaps even interest in sex. A healthy Yogic discipline normalizes the

figure and helps one to stay slim. It is interesting to note here that according to Ayurveda, physical conjugal bliss is indicated as a treatment for obesity (*Charak Samhita*).

Proper breathing is important in love-making — breathing depth is even taken as an indication of sexual ability. Deep, slow, controlled and rhythmic breathing, the Yogic way, does much to relax and energize one, thus contributing to satisfaction and fulfillment.

I would also like to mention certain techniques which are not very prevalent today, but are mentioned in Yoga texts for withdrawing the seminal fluid after it has been ejaculated. They are known as Vajroli, Sahajoli and Amroli. An ancient Yogic text by the great sage Gorakshanath describes these techniques, which actually pertain to sex, in detail. I will quote here directly from this rare and ancient manuscript.

मेहनेन शनैः सम्यगूर्ध्वाकुञ्चनमभ्यसेत् ।

पुरुषोऽप्यथवा नारी वज्रोलीं सिद्धिमाप्नुयात् ॥३॥

During sexual intercourse, man as well as woman can attain success in Vajroli by appropriately contracting and manipulating the inner organs of the pelvic region, so as to retain and draw in the pelvic secretions.

(The manipulations of the inner pelvic organs may include Moola Bandha, Tadagi Mudra, Uddiyana Bandha and also the physical effort to lift the secretions of the lower parts.)

नारीभगे पतद्विन्दुमभ्यासेनोर्ध्वमाहरेत् ।

चलितं च निजं विन्दुमूर्ध्वमाकृष्य रक्षयेत् ॥५॥

The fluid poured into the female pelvic region should be raised by practice; and as one's fluid begins to move (downwards) it should be saved by exerting an upward pull.

ऋतुमत्या रजोऽप्येवं बीजं बिन्दुं च रक्षयेत् ।

मेढे णाक षयेदूर्ध्वं सम्यगभ्यासयोगवित् ॥९॥

The fluid of the woman, taking into consideration her monthly period, united with the fluid (of man) should be drawn upwards and stabilized. The practitioner of this technique is the master of the science of Yōga.

सहजोलिरियं प्रोक्ता श्रेद्धेया योगिभिः सदा ।

अयं शुभकरो योगो भोगयुक्तोऽपी मुक्तिदः ॥३॥

Yogis should have an unfailing faith in Sahajoli, as described above. This Yoga is auspicious and brings salvation to the Yogi; verily it bestows salvation.

Generally, where there is Bhoga — physical pleasure, there is no Moksha — spiritual enlightenment. But, by adapting these techniques, one can have pleasure and salvation together.

There are even special and specific techniques for women.

पुंसो बिन्दुं समाकुञ्च्य सम्यगभ्यासपाटवात् ।

यदि नारी रजो रक्षेद्वज्रोल्या सापि योगिनी ॥१॥

A woman who with practice draws in the man's fluid after

uniting it with her own through the Vajroli technique is called a true Yogini.

This is further elucidated in the next sloka.

रक्षेदाकुञ्चनादूर्ध्वं मा रजः सा हि योगिनी ।
अतीतानागतं वेत्ति खेचरी च भवेत् ध्रुवम् ॥४॥

A woman who preserves and draws in the liquid contents from her pelvic region by gradual contractions — she alone is a true Yogini. She knows the past, present and the future.

तस्याः किञ्चिद्रजो नाशं न गच्छति न संशयः ।
तस्या शरीरे नादश्च बिन्दुता मे न गच्छति ॥२॥

In this way, even a droplet of her pelvic secretion is not wasted. There is no doubt about it, and the divine sound internally aroused in her is transformed into light. Through an outer union of male and female secretions there is creation of life, but through an inner union one attains the highest Yogic bliss.

देहसिद्धिं च लभते वज्रोत्यभ्यासयोगतः ।
अयं पुण्यकरो योगो भोगे भुक्तेऽपि मुक्तिदः ॥५॥

By the practice of these techniques pertaining to sex, the body attains a perfect condition. Fortunate are they who have access to such knowledge and succeed in this Yoga which brings spiritual liberation while giving total physical bliss.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradīpika* has similar slokas (Chapter III Verses 82-99). Although these verses seem to have direct physical rendering, experts say that it is a higher symbolic language denoting an inner spiritual experience and one should be careful when applying them on a purely physical plane.

Many a times, mental tensions or worries may mar your sexual ability. The vice versa is also true — sexual problems often become translated into mental problems. It is rightly said that there is no sexual organ more important than the human mind. There are no impotent or frigid animals — only human beings. That is because in the case of animals, their brains leave their spinal cords alone to handle their sexual activities.

Most sexual disorders from which people suffer are psychological in origin. It is wonderful to know how a little twisting of the body can untwist the mind. Regular practice of Yoga goes a long way in toning up not only the neuro-muscular structure of the organs concerned, but in steadying and rehabilitating the mind as well.

To sum up, Yoga practice does not necessitate a withdrawal from sex, nor does it lead to abnormal sexual vigour. It only has a normalising and corrective value, where needed.

Today, more and more people are taking to Yoga, not only in search of spirituality but also for sound physical and mental health. It is sought after by seekers of spiritual truth and materialistic alike and there is much in Yoga which will make the most worldly of pursuits, beautiful.

THERAPEUTIC APPLICATIONS OF YOGA TECHNIQUES

Yoga techniques, due to their psycho-physiological nature, can be employed in the management of psychosomatic diseases and stress disorders. It should be remembered, however, that originally Yoga was not developed as a system of therapeutics, in the real sense of the term and Ayurveda dealt with this aspect. Ayurveda and Yoga had developed hand-in-hand for years, which only goes to suggest their complementary nature. Today, Yoga therapy may be considered as a complement of modern systems of medicine.

For the purpose of Yoga therapy, diseases may be classified as follows:

- I. Those predominantly related to
 - (a) hyper-functioning, or
 - (b) hypo-functioning of the nervous system
- II. Those predominantly related to
 - (a) emotions, and
 - (b) the intellect of the individual.
- III. Endocrinal and metabolic disorders.

Disorders due to nutritional, contagious, accidental, organic, structural and ecological factors are not taken into consideration here, as they are beyond the scope of the techniques described in this book. General therapies are given below as guide-lines, but it must be remembered that therapy is an art which requires individual attention.

Guiding Principles of Yoga Therapy

Relaxation

Every psychosomatic and functional disorder is an outcome of stress and strain, giving rise to tension which leads to either excessive stimulation or inhibition of the nervous system. This, in turn, gives rise to various disturbances at the functional level, in the form of imbalances in glandular secretions and muscle actions. Therefore, training the mind and the body to relax is vital for all types of disorders being cured by Yoga therapy. Shavasana and Yoga Nidra are the two important relaxation practices.

Asanas for posture correction

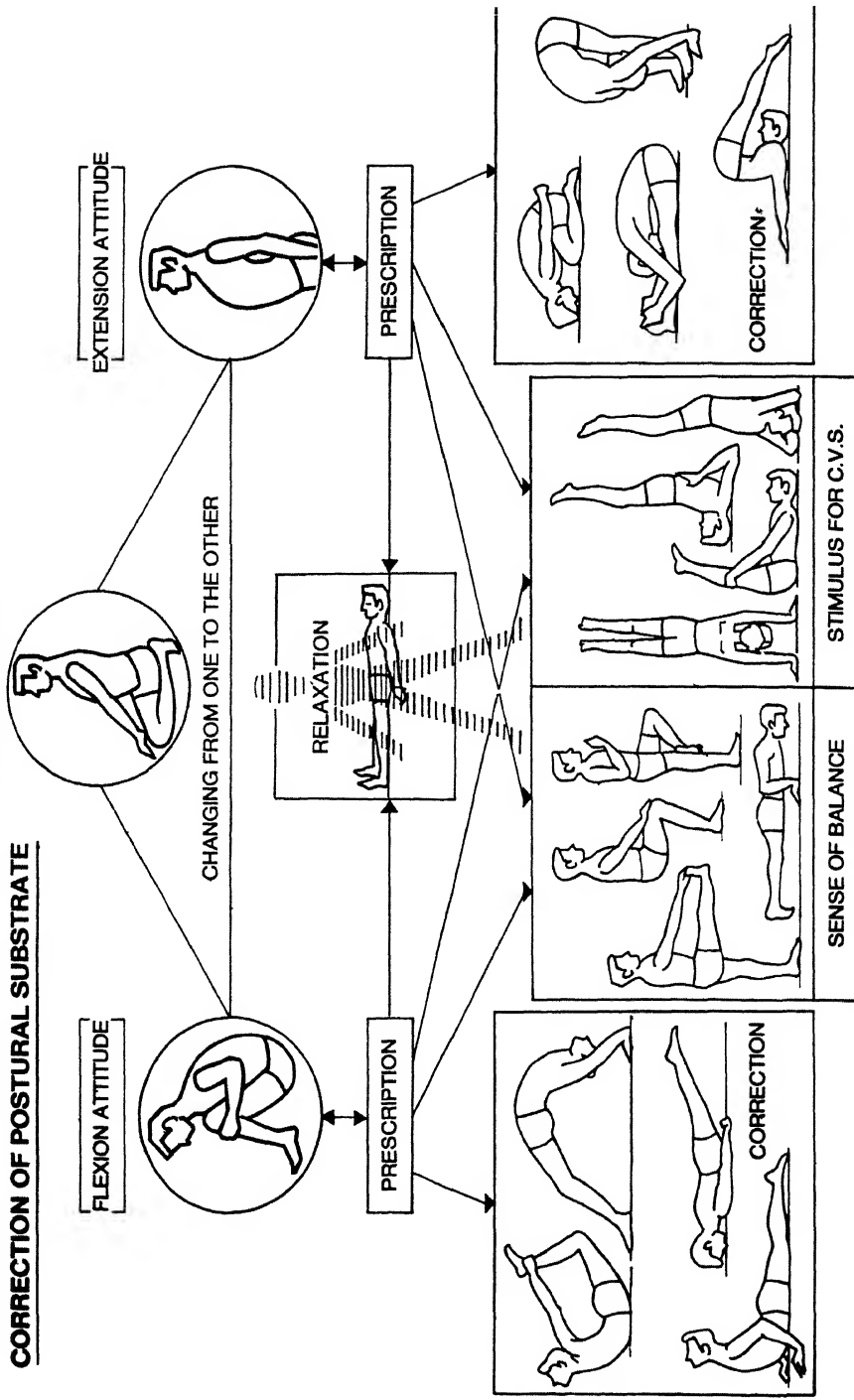
Most of the Asanas described earlier could be used to correct an individual's posture and this can bring about a change at the psychological level. A theme to correct the postural substrate is presented below.

Breathing techniques in Asanas to improve muscle tone

For hypotonic body muscles, it is better to practise Asanas after deep inhalation and to hold the breath (internal retention), while the Asana is being maintained. But for hypertonic muscles, it is better to practise Asanas after exhalation and to hold the breath out (external retention), during the maintenance period. However, it can be strenuous, practising breath retention and then one should take in as many

CORRECTION OF POSTURAL SUBSTRATE

— IDEAL CONDITION —



small breaths as desired during retention, internal or external.

Sequential practices

These practices, such as Surya Namaskar, are advocated for those who feel that they get too rigidly fixed to one thing. Changing Asanas will break this tendency of the mind. Constant awareness of the mind and the body, during practice, also helps.

Condition of the eyes

The eyes can be kept open or closed during Yoga practices. Initially, if the eyes are open, the mind tends to get distracted by the external environment. Then it is better to keep them closed and direct the awareness to the movement of the breath within the body. If the eyes are kept open, they must be focussed on a single point.

Cleansing processes

These are very important in many of the functional disorders. These Kriyas, such as Neti, Dhauti, etc., influence the autonomic nervous system and the mind. In many cases, the effect may be slow in onset. Cleansing processes must be done under the guidance of a Yoga teacher who will give further details during the practices.

Pranayama

This is a very useful tool in Yogic therapy, especially if one

can acquire the ability to reach the subtle level of Pranic activity in the body. However, most of us just learn to manipulate the breath. But this too, has many benefits, as the function of the whole brain, (both voluntary and involuntary) gets modified in due course of time. Regular breathing helps the regulation of various physiological and psychological functions.

Practices vary from individual to individual, but most people can start Nadi Shuddhi and Ujjayi Pranayama, without any trouble. Other types of Pranayamas can be learnt according to individual requirements.

Initially, it is advisable to refrain from breath retention. Later one can gradually incorporate Kumbhaka and Bahya Kumbhaka. Individuals, who are extroverts by nature and those with agitated nerves, should proceed with Sunyaka and Bahya Kumbhaka, while people with inhibitions or introverts, should proceed with Kumbhaka. A session of Kriyas before the practice, makes Pranayama more advantageous. A session of Asanas, ending with Shavasana, before commencing Pranayama, will also prove beneficial.

Dietary moderations and modifications

These are always useful and sometimes essential. Ayurveda mentions, that with proper diet, no diseases will arise, and without the observation of dietary considerations, no medicine will work effectively. The same holds good for Yoga techniques too.

Mental tensions and meditation

Through Pranayamas and Asanas¹, an individual may have

some inner experiences while the tensions at the gross level are being tackled and released. At this stage, one can become aware of the mental tensions and conflicts. This can create turbulence, because the individual is confronted with itself, and this can greatly increase sensitivity for some time. It is a very critical period and Yogic therapy can be very effective at this stage. People do not generally reach this state as they are more concerned with superficial physical effects of Asanas and Pranayamas. But if an aspirant can come upto this level, and has access to proper guidance, the chances of a permanent cure for ailments are greatly enhanced. This can be done by the practice of meditation.

Going into meditative or reflective moods will unfold the causes of one's own sufferings and it may inspire a change of values, life style and attitude to life, in order to remain content, healthy and happy. At this stage, one realizes the nature and importance of Yamas and Niyamas as advocated for a Yoga aspirant in comparison to similar precepts and practices emphasized for good social and moral behaviour in the educational system. The former is developed from within while the latter is imposed from the outside.

Hypertension

Relaxation is the basic practice. Recognising the source of tension and releasing tension can give permanent relief. Most of the time the patient tries to block the tension from being manifested, in the form of high blood pressure. Therefore, even though the blood pressure is normal, the tensions still operate. The realization of this fact will enable one to appreciate the importance of a Yogic approach, which requires a long journey rather than a short cut.

Dietary reformations, such as cutting out spicy, sour and fried foods, should be incorporated. Relaxing poses, such as Shavasana and Yoga Nidra along with Ujjayi Pranayama are effective. Through clinical work, Dr. Datey [1] has established the utility of relaxation in the management of hypertension.

Rehabilitation after heart attack and myocardial infarction

Relaxation, changing one's attitude to life situations, the practise of Asanas based on the principle of 'exercise without exertion' and taking to Pranayama as a technique to understand and manipulate the functioning of the involuntary nervous system, could be practised with advantage after heart attack and by patients with myocardial infarction and ischaemic heart disease. Dr. T.H. Tulpule's [2,3] work has shown significant results in this area.

Bronchial asthma

The treatment could be started with suitable cleansing processes, such as, Neti, Dhauti, Kapalbhathi, Shankha-Prakshalan and Uddiyana Bandha, during the attack free period. This should be coupled with Pranayama, relaxation and corrective Asanas. Infections, etc., should be treated by suitable medicaments. If the attack has set in, then it is advisable to switch over to medicines. Dr. Bhole and others [4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9] at Kaivalyadhama, Lonavala, have proved the efficacy of Yogic techniques in the management of bronchial asthma.

Diabetes

Obese type of patients can commence with Asanas, such as, Ardha Matsyendrasana and Halasana, cleansing processes, Bhastrika and relaxation. The lean and thin type of patients can start with relaxation and Pranayama. They should practise Asanas in a very relaxed manner. The work by Dr. T.H. Tulpule [12], Dr. Divekar [10] and Dr. Mahamoud [1], can be referred to for further details.

Constipation

Drink lukewarm water with salt (0.9% saline) till the stomach is moderately full before starting Asanas, and continue drinking a glass or half-a-glass, in between, to stimulate the peristaltic action of the intestines and colon. In the beginning, one may not get a motion immediately after the session of Asanas. Gradually, this period will start coming nearer to the Asana session and later one could even get a motion before the session. But this must be continued with until the old habit is broken and the new one established. The influence of Yoga techniques on the position of the colon and its contents, has been dealt with extensively by Swami Kuvalayananda [13,14].

Sinusitis, headaches

The main practices for this complaint are Neti Kriyas of various kinds — Kapalbhati Pranayama and Nadi-Shuddhi Pranayama. Work done by Dr. Bhole at Kaivalyadhama, Lonavala, has shown that this trouble can be tackled very effectively through Yoga education.

Hyperacidity and biliousness

A start can be made with Dhautis, and then the patient can switch over to relaxation and meditation. The latter will tackle the root of the problem, the tensions, which could be very deep seated.

For heartburn or the inability to go to sleep due to stomach disturbances, it is advisable to practise water Dhauti, even after a full meal, till one gets relief. This practice will only remove an excess of acid from the stomach. It may not correct the secretory pattern of the stomach glands, for which other practices will be more useful.

The work by Dr. S.L. Vinekar in the physiotherapy unit of K E.M. Hospital, Bombay, in collaboration with Dr. Vahia [16] and others, gave positive results in the first clinical trial with laboratory investigations. Patients with peptic ulcers also showed improvement.

Cervical Spondylosis

Apart from training in relaxation, Brahma Mudra (see below) has been found to be effective. Asanas, such as, Talasana and Parvatasana, give a natural traction to the spine and allow the vertebrae to adjust. Ardha Matsyendrasana, Bhujangasana and other such Asanas working on the lumbar region are also useful.

NOTE: Brahma Mudra — In this practice, the head is moved to the right, then to the left and then up and down. But cervical spondylosis patients should not bend the head down.

Slipped disc

Bhujangasana, Shalabhasana and Dhanurasana are the main Asanas recommended, along with relaxation. Even though forward bending Asanas like Paschimottanasana are contra-indicated, they could be done with advantage, under the guidance of an expert. But as a general rule of thumb, it is better to avoid forward bending Asanas.

Obesity

Apart from the cleansing processes, Bhastrika Pranayama and Asanas (such as, Sarvangasana, Dhanurasana and Paschimottanasana) can increase the metabolism and induce some corrective mechanisms in the body. Relaxation and meditation, aimed at increasing the level and intensity of satisfaction, arising from within, has a more lasting effect on the control of this problem, and this is supported by the works of Dr. M.L. Gharote [17] and Dr. Divekar [10].

Rheumatic arthritis

Asanas listed in this book can be attempted in a progressive manner, i.e., from simple to difficult and stress should be laid on maintaining the position in a relaxed manner for some time, where one feels some stretching and bearable pain. But if the pain increases, that particular Asana should be stopped. Cleansing processes will be of immense use, but they will take some time to show their effect. In acute conditions, medical advice must be sought.

Psychological conditions

To discover the causes of depression, Yoga Nidra and meditation are useful techniques. In depression, to increase vitality, energy and harmonize the mind, Moola Bandha, Nadi Shuddhi and Ujjayi Pranayama, can be practised. Cleansing processes and appropriate Asanas to correct the posture, done under guidance, will also affect the mental health. (See diagram on page 53).

Some work on cases of neurosis and Anxiety Scale Questionnaire (ASQ) and Neurotic Scale Questionnaire (NSQ) studies by Dr. Bhole and Mrs. Oak [9] are good pointers in this field.

Pregnancy

Pregnancy is not considered as a disease, but since many in this condition seek guidance, it has merely been dealt with over here for convenience. Yoga practices should suit the nature of the various psycho-physiological changes taking place during pregnancy.

In the first trimester (1st to 3rd months), a routine of simple Asanas, without any jerky movements can be practised. If there is nausea and vomiting, water Dhauti may be practised.

In the second trimester (4th to 6th months), mild Uddiyana Bandha, Pranayama and relaxation would prove useful, along with simple Asanas.

In the third trimester (7th to 9th months), very mild Uddiyana Bandha, Pranayama without Kumbhaka and breath awareness with simple Asanas, involving leg movements will be useful.

During the pre-natal period, women need a sound frame

of mind along with physical fitness to make the delivery a happy experience. Mental and physical tensions are often the main causes of difficult and obstructed deliveries. Selected Yoga practices definitely enhance the physical and mental health of pregnant women. It also teaches them to relax at will.

After delivery

After the wonderful function of child-birth is over, nature starts the work of rehabilitation in its unique way. A good, post-natal Yoga programme assists and quickens the natural process of rehabilitation. It assures the mother an attractive figure and helps her to maintain mental and physical fitness. One can start with Ashwini Mudra for assisting the process of involution. Uddiyana Bandha and breath awareness would prove useful with simple Asanas.

For children — To increase height

Almost all the cultural postures help to increase height, especially when combined with a suitable diet. It is more marked during the growing years. Of special benefit are Talasana, Bhujangasana, Paschimottanasana, Parvatasana, Chakrasana and Surya Namaskar.

Old Age Problems

The nature of problems in old age varies from individual to individual. These can be tackled by a suitable course of Asanas, Pranayamas and meditative practices. But consideration to individual wants and needs will have to be

given while chalking out a programme in Yogic practices. Dr. Gogate and Dr. Tulpule [18] are working in this field after their studies on the effects of Yogic exercises on middle aged men.

Assuming that there is old age without serious bodily problems like paralysis, there are some common underlying complaints of old age.

One major problem is the loss of sleep and how to spend the sleepless hours at night without causing disturbance. Often, elderly people are lonely and need someone to talk to. But others are usually busy with their own work and do not have as much spare time as the old people. All the systems in the body start operating at a lower key, i.e., slower, and therefore, create problems for the individual, who wants to remain at a higher level of efficiency. These factors create tension, increasing the sensitivity of the individual and making him less tolerant.

A general recommended approach to tackle these problems is the practice of simple Asanas which the individual is capable of doing, without exertion, in a recreational and relaxed manner.

Instead of giving importance to the contraction of the muscles, one should try to feel the muscles that are being stretched in the different Asanas. This helps to release the tension and gives rise to relaxation.

Breath awareness should be developed by becoming aware of the touch of air within the nostrils. Awareness can also be developed by feeling the slow and rhythmic movement of the abdomen and thorax as inhalation and exhalation follow each other. This can be easily done when there is difficulty in going to sleep and when there is a feeling of loneliness.

For specific problems, it is better to consult a doctor and a Yoga therapist who can prescribe medicines, diet and Yoga techniques.

Minimum Muscular Fitness and Autonomic Balance

This was seen to improve significantly through a Yoga training programme in school-going children. For these studies, the plan of Yogic physical culture developed by Swami Kuvalyananda was employed. Three types of training programmes, viz., easy, short and full course in Asanas, Pranayama, and Kriyas were formed. The students were given an easy course to begin with and within 6 weeks, they were introduced to the full course. As Yoga techniques work on the neuro-vegetative system, the emotional aspects of the student got influenced in a very subtle way, modifying the autonomic balance and the nature of muscular fitness.

Cerebral Palsy

In a study, by Mr. M.G. Mokashi [19], at the All India Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, children have shown a good response to a very simple course in Asanas and Pranayamas.

Blood Cholesterol

A training programme in Yogic physical culture recommended by the National Fitness Corps' Syllabus of the Government of India (1965), for one hour every day, for 3 weeks, was seen to bring the cholesterol levels within normal

range. This programme includes the following: Vajrasana, Bhujangasana, Shalabhasana, Chakrasana, Paschimotanasana, Yoga Mudra, Ardha Matsyendrasana, Dhanurasana, Sirshasana, Mayurasana, Supta Vajrasana, Kapalbhata, Uddiyana and Ujjayi.

GLOSSARY

ahimsa	non-violence
aparigrah	non-covetousness, non-greed
asana	a comfortable and steady posture, the third limb of yoga
asatya	untruth
ashram	retreat, hermitage
asteya	non-stealing
baikhari	one of the four energies said to be operative in producing sound; sacred sound chanted loudly
basti	a purification practice of hatha yoga used to clean the large intestine by drawing water through the rectum
bhakti	devotion or worship
brahmacharya	one of the five ethical rules of conduct; conservation and rechanneling of sexual energy towards spiritual and meditational practices
brahma mudra	the movement of the head in four directions—right, left, up and down — symbolizing the four headed Brahma
brahmamuhurta	the most auspicious time for spiritual and meditational practices; divine time — around 6 a.m.
brumadhyā	the eye-brow centre — one of the nine spots in the body on which the 'yogis concentrate

brumadhya drishti	gazing at the eye-brow centre
chakra	a wheel or circle, centre of psychic vital energy in the body
chatai	mat made of dry straw grass
chidakash	space of consciousness; space behind the forehead where all visualization and psychic events are viewed
dharna	concentration; the sixth limb of yoga mentioned by Patanjali
dhauti	strip of cloth; a purification practice of hatha yoga used to clean the stomach
dhyana	a state of meditation; the seventh limb of yoga
drishti	gaze
gyana yoga	yoga of oneness through systematic knowledge
hatha yoga	physical yoga
ishta devta	presiding deity
ishwar pranidhan	resignation to the will of God
japa	repetition of sacred sound or prayer
kapalbhati	kapal—skull; bhati—shine; cleansing the sinuses
karma yoga	yoga of action but detachment from the fruits of action
kumbhaka	retention of breath
kumbhaka bahya (sunya)	holding the breath out after exhalation
kundalini	vital force at the base of the spine, represented as a sleeping serpent coiled 3½ times
shakti	energy; potentiality
likhit	written

mandala	sacred circular symbol
mansik	mental
mantra	sacred sound that is repeated
mooladhara chakra	nervous plexus situated at the base of the spine; the lowest chakra
nada	mystical sound that arises internally
nasagra drishti	gazing at the tip of the nose
navli	a surging, side to side movement of the abdominal muscles
neti	a purification practice for cleaning the nose
nirguna	abstract
niyama	five observances — ethical rules — saucha, santosa, tapa, swadhyaya, ishwar pranidhan; the second limb of yoga
prana	life-force; breath
pranayama	control of life-force by rhythmic control of breath; the fourth limb of yoga
pranava	the sacred syllable Aum which is said to be the one-lettered brahma
pratyahar	withdrawal of the senses; elimination of sense impressions communicated to the brain
puraka	inhalation
raja yoga	yoga of the control of the mind
rechaka	exhalation
rishi	seer; sage
saguna	with form, colour, shape
samadhi	a state of unutterable joy and peace in which the yogi is one with the object of his meditation

sanyasin	a renunciate; inner renunciation of the fruits of action and of all worldly attachments
santosa	contentment
satchitananda	sat—truth; chit—knowledge, consciousness, ananda—bliss; perfect being
saucha	cleanliness
shanmukhi	six mouths or openings
sloka	couplet
swadhyaya	self-study
tantra	a technique of self-realization
tapa	fortitude
tiryaka	twisted
trataka	steady gazing at an object; restraining the movements of the eyes
yama	five ethical rules of conduct — ahimsa, asatya, asteya, brahmacharya and aparigraha; the first limb of yoga
yantra	a visual aid to meditation construed from geometric triangles, circles and squares
yoga	union; the science of merging the individual consciousness with cosmic consciousness
yogi, yogin	one who practices yoga
yoni	womb; source
udarakarshanasana	abdominal massage pose; one of the asanas performed in shankha-prakshalan
upanshu	whispered mantra — so that only the lips move but there is no sound

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